Canonical Plays in Contemporary European Directors' Theatre

Shakespeare, Ibsen and Brecht

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Abstract

The canon, the way it is formed and the ideologies it supports and expresses have been thoroughly criticised in academic contexts over the last sixty years. In the theatre, however, canonical plays are continuously reproduced, often with specific ideas on how the plays relate to contemporary times, to contemporary situations and to contemporary experiences. This thesis explores why and how the canon (particularly plays by Shakespeare, Ibsen and Brecht) is reproduced by six contemporary European theatre directors (Emma Rice and Joe Hill-Gibbins from the UK, Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson and Christopher Rüping from Germany, and Alexander Mørk-Eidem and Sigrid Strøm Reibo from Norway). Drawing on the theories of Chantal Mouffe on agonism and 'critical art', the thesis investigates whether theatrical reproduction of the canon always leads to reconstituting the hegemonic values and ideologies contained in and expressed through the canon, or whether theatrical interventions in the canon can challenge such values and ideologies, and thereby also challenge the dominant ideologies and hegemonies of contemporary culture and society. The main findings and arguments are tied to a self-reflective quality identified in the directors' work. These directors do not only reproduce the canon, but through their staging choices – related to questioning the canon, their own relationship to it, and the very situation their productions constitute – they continually and explicitly investigate what it means to reproduce the canon today and in their particular contexts. Their productions are not clear examples of Mouffe's 'critical art', but their self-reflective attitude can be seen as a move towards this kind of art, because the hegemonic order (either constituted by the canon or the theatrical situation) is never taken for granted but is always challenged and seen as up for negotiation. As such, while not countering all the problematic features of the canon, this kind of theatre can be viewed as a move toward a more critical engagement with the canon in the theatre.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis begins with a question: in the contemporary context of digitalisation, the internet and climate change, why do theatre directors continue to produce and reproduce the literary canon? The canon, the way it is formed and the ideologies it supports and expresses have been thoroughly criticised in the scholarly field over the last sixty years. The canon has been accused of being too white, male and Western, and it has been pointed out that it excludes many voices and experiences. And yet, in the theatre, canonical plays are continuously reproduced, often with specific ideas on how the plays relate to contemporary times, to contemporary situations and to contemporary experiences. In this thesis, I explore why the canon is reproduced by contemporary theatre directors. I investigate whether such reproduction always leads to reconstituting the values and ideologies of the past contained in the canon, or whether theatrical interventions in the canon can challenge such values and ideologies, and thereby also challenge the dominant ideologies and hegemonies of contemporary culture and society.

Another question from which my research departs can be formulated as follows: What kind of artwork is a contemporary theatrical production of a canonical text, such as *Hamlet* (1603)? It is a fusion of several different sources and influences, including the words, characters and plot of Shakespeare's 400-year-old text, the imaginations, ideas and skills of the director, actors and other artists that participate in the production, the history of *Hamlet* as cultural and theatrical phenomenon and the cultural and political context of the contemporary performance. A contemporary production of *Hamlet*, or of any canonical play of the past, is a melting pot where the past meets the present. The relationship between past and present in a contemporary production of a canonical play can be difficult to pin down. On the one hand, a canonical text is always written in and for a culture that is different from the contemporary time in which it is performed. It is therefore always governed by conventions, references,

topics and values that are foreign to the receiving audience. British scholar of culture, literature and drama Raymond Williams acknowledges this. He argues:

> One lesson that we then have to draw is that some of the major drama of the past, which we can see to be superbly fashioned for its own purposes, is, while always available as art (the art of another period, to be consciously looked at) not at all available, in the same way, as a basis for new work (1979: 166).

For Williams, plays of the past are 'superbly fashioned' for the context of the culture in which they were first written and performed. However, for members of a different culture, for example a contemporary audience, the plays will always to a certain extent be foreign. They are available as the artworks of a different time, almost like curiosities, but not as contemporary artworks for the here and now. This is a persuasive argument, and one that is problematic for theatrical productions of canonical plays. If texts of the past always are ultimately tied to the context they were written in, it becomes difficult for the theatre to use such plays for exploring contemporary circumstances. Even in a contemporary setting, a canonical play will first and foremost be of the past, and it will reproduce the values and ideologies of the contexts for which it was written. Instead of exploring the present, canonical plays reinstate the past.

Nevertheless, texts of the past continue to be performed in contemporary theatre. Here, they are the basis for new work. They are not new in themselves, but in their reproduction in the contemporary context something new is created. This view is held by French theatre scholar, playwright and dramaturg Joseph Danan. He argues that plays cannot be staged outside the context of contemporary theatrical paradigms, and he continues to formulate an important issue: '…if we still want to put [pre-existing plays] on (…) we must find in the plays that which will resonate in the language of the contemporary stage' (2014: 7-8). Danan agrees with Williams that plays of the past are written in and for a different culture. His

example is Corneille's *L'Illusion comique* (1636), which he argues 'is not a play written for the [contemporary] postdramatic stage. In fact it is quite the opposite' (2014: 10). To Danan, this play can only work on the contemporary stage if 'the historical nature of the play (…) is held in tension with the nature of audiences at the beginning of the twenty-first century, from a very different theatre context' (2014: 11). Taking Danan's argument into account, a more nuanced view becomes possible: while it is important to acknowledge that canonical texts originate in different cultural contexts, when such texts are produced in the contemporary theatre they always exist in the here-and-now, in the 'language of the contemporary stage'. I do not mean here to use Danan's point to argue that a text of the past must be made more intelligible, easier to understand or more familiar for a contemporary audience. Neither do I refer to the widespread practice of reframing old plays in contemporary settings. Rather, I point to how in the theatre tensions occur and connections are created between the text of the past and the theatrical and cultural situation of the present. Contemporary productions of canonical plays always create a merger where two cultures meet or even clash.

One way to look at this relationship between past and present in the theatre is as a process of mediation. Peter Boenisch argues that the theatre 'relates the written playtext with the present moment, in which the audience sees and senses the playtext, mediated through the production or *Inszenierung*' (2015: 21-22). In this view, a bridge between past and present is created through the choices that theatrical artists make in their productions. It is this bridge and how it is created that I will study in this thesis. It is important to note that this bridge is always a two-way street. The text is made to resonate in a contemporary situation, but just as important are the ways in which the contemporary situation is thrown light upon by the text. Boenisch notes that meaning in the theatre is created in 'an encounter with cultural traditions and registers of cultural memory, but ultimately also an encounter with ourselves as spectators' (2015: 22). Thus, a theatrical production of a canonical play involves both the text

and the culture in which it was created, the contemporary culture with its artists and audiences, and the gaps and tensions between these cultures. I focus on one type of theatre where these relations between past and present are particularly visible, namely the tradition of 'directors' theatre'. David Bradby and David Williams define the term 'directors' theatre' as theatre where 'the director claims the authorial function even though he [sic] has not written the original play' (1988: 1). In directors' theatre, directors claim the position of artist and creator from the author. Directors take control of the play and repurpose it for their own situations and the contemporary audience. The relationship between past and present in such productions is found in the tensions between the author's text and the director's use of that text.

My purpose in this thesis is to explore what happens to plays by canonical dramatic writers of the past, particularly William Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen and Bertolt Brecht, when they meet contemporary directors who work in the contemporary context, which is different to the worlds and cultures the texts originated in. I explore if, why and how canonical plays still carry meaning for contemporary artists and audiences, what directors find in such plays that resonates on the contemporary stage and the strategies they use to utilise it. Particularly, I study and analyse a set of strategies that can be seen as a fusion of Raymond Williams' and Joseph Danan's arguments where the tensions between past and present that always occur in theatrical productions of canonical plays are explicitly put forward and utilised on stage. In the thesis, I study the work of six theatre directors: Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson, Joe Hill-Gibbins, Alexander Mørk-Eidem, Emma Rice, Christopher Rüping and Sigrid Strøm Reibo. These directors, and my reasons for choosing them as case studies, will be introduced further below. For now, it suffices to say that these six directors not only work with various canonical plays, but they also negotiate the plays' canonical status, history, and cultural significance explicitly through specific staging choices. Thus, where Williams argues for the perpetual

'pastness' of canonical plays and Danan argues for the importance of creating contemporary relations in productions of such plays, I will point to and analyse a different set of strategies where both these issues are played out on stage through an explicit engagement with the canonicity, history and status of canonical plays. I will argue that such strategies of engaging with the cultural status of canonical plays can be the starting point for productions that not only engage contemporary audiences, but also investigate the role of theatre and of the canon in contemporary society.

The main issue that this thesis explores then, is what the canon means and how it is treated in contemporary European directors' theatre. As I will elaborate in my literature review below, much of the scholarly work that has been done on the literary canon in recent years have been critical of the ideological implications of the canon and has sought ways to interrogate, challenge and subvert it. While this development has happened in academia, the theatre keeps reproducing the canon through continuous productions of canonical plays. I will discuss whether the kind of canon critique we see in academia has spread to contemporary theatre practice and, if so, how such a critique influences the way canonical works are staged today or if theatre directors challenge the canon in ways that have not been discussed in academia. My main research questions are:

1. Why do theatre directors still engage with the canon? What do contemporary artists find in producing canonical texts from the past? Do contemporary theatre artists see the canon in a critical light, even when using canonical texts as basis for their productions?
2. How do the six directors under consideration engage with canonicity explicitly in their stagings? What do the history and status of the canon itself offer these directors in the process of creating contemporary productions of canonical plays?

3. What are the political implications and potentials of producing canonical texts in contemporary theatre? More specifically, using the theories of Chantal Mouffe, which I will introduce further below, I ask: how can producing canonical texts in contemporary theatre contribute to challenging hegemony and develop pluralist democratic practices and identities? And finally, are such potentials realised in the work of the directors under consideration?

Thus, the main aim of this thesis is to develop a deeper understanding of why and how the theatre, and particularly directors' theatre, engage with the canon, and to understand what theatrical productions of canonical plays do in the contemporary context and what kinds of political and cultural acts such productions perform.

This introductory chapter sets the scene for my research and is divided into three main parts. First, I discuss issues related to the theoretical framework of my thesis. These include the concepts of 'the canon' and of 'directors' theatre', the relationship between theatre, canon and ideology, and the theories of art's critical potentials as formulated by French political theorist Chantal Mouffe. The theoretical discussion below outlines the broader scholarly landscape to which the thesis, and its arguments, contribute. Secondly, I move on to discuss the demarcation of my research, specifically how I approach 'contemporary European directors' theatre'. I introduce the six directors that are the main case studies of this thesis, and I discuss the reasons behind choosing to analyse their work. In the third part of this chapter, I describe and discuss the methods I have used in my research: analysis of productions, interviews, and rehearsal observation. I finish the present chapter with an outline of the thesis' structure.

1.1 Theoretical framework

In this section, I will give an overview of the main theoretical fields I draw on in the thesis, and I will position my research in relation to these fields. The section is divided into five subsections. The first subsection introduces the concept of 'the canon'. I present theories of canon formation and canon criticism, and I focus specifically on how the canon can be seen as an expression of hegemonic ideology. In order to understand whether and how theatre can begin to challenge the relation between canon and hegemony, I introduce, in the second subsection, the French political thinker Chantal Mouffe. I give a brief overview of Mouffe's political theories in general, before I focus on how Mouffe envisages the critical potential of art. The third subsection discusses the relation between the canon and theatre, and I show how theatre can both be seen as contributing to the formation of the canon, while also having the potential to challenge and subvert the canon and its political and ideological connotations. In the fourth subsection, I return to Mouffe and present three specific points from her theories – disrupting hegemony, forming collective identities, and facilitating an agonistic public space – that will form the basis for my analysis of the relation between theatre and the canon. The fifth section contexualise my research within the wider scholarly field and argues for its original contribution to knowledge.

1.1.1 Canon – The repository of dominant ideology

The first central concept for my research in this project is the notion of 'the canon', and it is important to clarify how I intend to engage with this notion. Not only does the canon pose a question about which texts to include and which to exclude as canonical, but the concept of 'the canon' itself, what it is and particularly the ideological implications of it, is a highly debated issue. In the following, I will give a brief review of theories of the canon and the

discussions that surround it, and through this review I will clarify what the term 'canon' will mean in this thesis.

The word 'canon' derives from the Greek and has existed with different meanings since antiquity when it referred to 'a set of unsurpassable masterpieces to be studied and copied by all later practitioners in the field' (Gorak, 2014: 11). Jan Gorak sums up the different usages of the word and defines '[t]hree important meanings of *canon* currently in use', namely 'a teaching guide, a norm or rule, and a list of basic authorities' (2014: 9). In secular terms, within the humanities and perhaps especially within literature studies, 'canon' has usually referred to a group of authoritative works that show great quality and merit and survive through history because people continue to read and study them. Harold Bloom argues that this 'secular canon, with the word meaning a catalogue of approved authors, does not actually begin until the middle of the eighteenth century' (1994: 20). The secular canon, as we use the notion today, is first and foremost close to the third meaning that Gorak presents above – the 'list of basic authorities' – but through its influence it can also work as teaching guide and form the basis of norms and rules.

Throughout the twentieth century, several ways of defining canonical works were suggested. Most definitions share a view of canonical works as particularly 'good' in a qualitative sense. For example, Frank Kermode argues that for a work to be selected to be part of the canon 'there must be some quality in the work itself which encourages the regular confirmation of the choice' (1971: 175). However, attempts to define canonical works often differ in what exactly constitutes this quality. One important early definition was made by T. S. Eliot in his essay *What is a Classic?*[1] Eliot explains his view in the following way: 'If there

[1] Although Eliot writes about 'the classic', I would argue that what he means by the term is close to what I refer to as 'canonical work'. In this thesis, I prefer the term 'canonical work' to avoid the association of the word 'classic' to the Classical period of Greek and Roman antiquity. Particularly in the theatre, where several of the

is one word on which we can fix, which will suggest the maximum of what I mean by the term 'a classic', it is the word *maturity*' (1945: 10). To Eliot, a classic is a work of literature that originates in a culture when it has reached a mature stage and which expresses the highest level of language and thought in that specific culture: 'The classic must, within its formal limitations, express the maximum possible of the whole range of feeling which represents the character of the people who speak that language' (1945: 27). As I will discuss further below, such a normative definition of the canon is problematic in a number of ways. With regards to Eliot, it is problematic that his view posits that people who share a language also share feelings and thoughts, and that such general feelings and thoughts can be expressed through works of literature. It is also difficult to accept that cultures necessarily 'mature' over time. Another, quite similar description of the canonical quality of literary works is made by Harold Bloom in his book *The Western Canon. The Books and School of the Ages.* Bloom's work is fundamental in establishing the concept of the Western canon, but it is also highly problematic because he bases his selection on subjective quality-criteria, and he attacks those who challenge the canon, for example for its lack of diversity, for being part of what he dismissively calls 'the School of Resentment' (1994: 4). In *The Western Canon*, Bloom studies 26 writers that he considers to be canonical in Western culture, and his goal is 'to isolate the qualities that made these authors canonical, that is, authoritative in our culture' (1994: 1). The quality he finds '[turns] out to be strangeness, a mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated, or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange' (1994: 3). For Bloom, a work becomes canonical because it posits a certain strangeness that forces readers to reflect on and widen their perspectives. Like Eliot's view above, Bloom's definition is problematic because it suggests that canonical works posit a certain strangeness

most canonical texts are from this period (tragedies by Aeschylius, Sophocles and Euripides and comedies by Aristophanes, Plautus and Terence), this association could be potentially confusing.

that necessarily will be seen by everyone who reads them. Both Eliot and Bloom seek to define a canonical work through some qualitative characteristic inherent in the work itself such as 'maturity' and 'strangeness'. The problem, of course, with such qualitative terms for defining the canon is that they remain subjective, and thus imbue the process of ascribing 'canonical' status as inherently political.

The exertion of power when deciding what works are of high enough value for the canon is what has given rise to the major debates concerning the concept of the canon in recent years, namely discussions of the potential political powers and ideological values that lie embedded in the canon. Raymond Williams looks at cultural and social processes much more widely than the more literary-focused Eliot and Bloom, and he therefore has some useful insights into how the past is preserved in the present. He argues that 'a tradition is not the past, but an interpretation of the past: a selection and valuation of ancestors, rather than a neutral record. And if this is so, the present, at any time, is a factor in the selection and valuation' (2001: 96). For the purpose of this discussion, it is tempting to replace the word 'tradition' in Williams' argument with the word 'canon'. Like Williams' 'traditions', the canon is never a complete record of the past, but a selection based on the values and ideologies at work in the present, and thus it is as much an expression of such present values and ideologies as an expression of the past. Taking this argument into consideration, the canon reflects the version of the past which to the greatest extent emphasises and reconstitutes dominant values, ideologies and power structures of the present, and similarly it excludes counter-hegemonic practices and voices. This is the main criticism against the canon. The philosopher Dean Kolbas sums up this critical view in the following way:

> [T]he canon has been dominated by "dead, white European males," excluding authors and artists from social groups that have historically been marginalized or that do not

> conform to the interests of the dominant culture. It is therefore condemned as an elitist, patriarchal, racist, or ethnocentric construction (2001: 1).

As Kolbas points out, authors who belong to marginalised groups have usually been excluded from the canon, and inclusion in the canon is not necessarily based on aesthetic qualities in the works themselves but on how the works fit into hegemonic values, ideologies and power structures. Taking Williams' and Kolbas' arguments into consideration, the canon can be seen as an institution that controls culture by deciding which works are considered valuable and which voices are heard. By suggesting that some voices are worth listening to ('dead, white European males'), the canon also excludes other voices, such as those of female or ethnic minority authors. Thus, the canon can be seen to constitute and confirm the status quo and the dominant power structures in society.

To further understand such political implications of the canon it can be useful to look at the canon in relation to French philosopher Louis Althusser's notion of 'ideological state apparatuses'. Althusser suggests that power structures in society are kept in place not only by the concrete state apparatus, such as the government, the army, the police and so on, but also through a set of other apparatuses that he calls the 'ideological state apparatuses' (shortened ISA). The ideological state apparatuses include for example the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA and the cultural ISA. To Althusser, these apparatuses are different in nature, but they are all unified by the fact that they express and function through hegemonic ideology:

> If the ISAs 'function' massively and predominantly by ideology, what unifies their diversity is precisely this functioning, insofar as the ideology by which they function is always in fact unified, despite its diversity and its contradictions, *beneath the ruling ideology*, which is the ideology of 'the ruling class' (1984: 20).

Althusser's point is that there are many practices in society that contribute to producing and reinforcing hegemony and its ideology, and thus function as ISAs. Althusser includes cultural discourses as an ISA. He argues that 'the ideology that [the cultural ISA] realizes is anchored in practices either aesthetic (the theatre, film, literature) or physical (sport) that are not reducible to the ideology for which they serve as a support' (2014: 77). Thus, according to Althusser, even artistic practices serve as support for dominant ideology. Following Althusser, the canon can be seen as part of the cultural ISA. Works become canonical because they fit with contemporary values and power structures, and as such the canon is an expression of dominant ideology. The institution of the canon can be seen as an ideological state apparatus within the wider category of the cultural ideological state apparatus. Critical voices can argue that canonical works do not have any specific qualitative characteristics, but rather they achieve their status because they confirm existing power structures and hegemonic ideology.

This criticism against the canon is concerning for the theatre's engagement with canonical texts. If the canon is always part of the hegemony of the status quo, theatrical productions of canonical plays must be seen as further reconstitutions of this hegemony and as reproductions of its symbolic orders. Theatre that engages with the canon is always part of the hegemonic order, and there is seemingly little room for questioning or challenging the hegemonic order through this kind of theatre. Engaging with the canon might thus seemingly be a hindrance for theatre's chances of being a progressive voice in society. However, in this thesis I want to explore whether/how theatrical productions of canonical plays can subvert the ideologies of the canon and of the hegemonic order. I want to interrogate whether theatrical productions of canonical texts are always doomed to reproduce hegemonic ideologies and values, or whether there is room for progressive potential in such theatre. At this point, it is useful to turn to a theory of art that sees art's critical potential exactly in the opportunity it

provides for questioning, challenging and subverting ideology and hegemony, namely the discussions of critical art by French political thinker Chantal Mouffe.

1.1.2 Chantal Mouffe, part one: Art's potential for counter-hegemonic interventions

Chantal Mouffe's reflections on art's political potential begin with an important question, namely, what kind of political power or impact can art have in today's capitalist society? Mouffe asks: 'Can artistic practices still play a role in a society where the difference between art and advertising have become blurred and where artists and cultural workers have become a necessary part of capitalist production' (2007, unpaginated)? A possible answer to this question would be to claim that art is now so included in the rule of the market that it has lost all possibilities for providing true challenges to power. Mouffe summarises such views on art in the following way:

> Nowadays artistic and cultural production play a central role in the process of capital valorization and, through 'neo-management', artistic critique has become an important element of capitalist productivity. This has led some people to claim that art [has] lost its critical power because any form of critique is automatically recuperated and neutralized by capitalism (2007, unpaginated).

According to Mouffe, the current political hegemony is structured around liberal capitalism and all elements of life, including art, are subsumed in capitalism. Art is just another form of capitalist reproduction, and 'there is no place anymore for art to provide a truly subversive experience' (2013: 85). This view of art is similar to the criticism against the canon that I have discussed in the previous subsection. In the same way as canon criticism sees the canon as a reproduction of past values and ideologies, art can be seen as so embedded in hegemonic capitalist structures that it becomes impossible to question or subvert hegemonic ideology. In this view, even when attempting to challenge dominant ideology and power structures, the

result will simply reproduce dominant ideology under the disguise of politically radical projects. This view of art is rather pessimistic, but it is also quite persuasive. In many instances, it might indeed be the case that art is wrapped up in capitalist structures and therefore fails at providing truly subversive experiences. However, while acknowledging the value of the questions above and using them as points of departure for her discussion of art's political potential, Mouffe presents a more optimistic view of art's critical potential in her writings, and it is this theory of critical art that I will focus on in this section. Mouffe's views on art must be seen in relation to her wider theory of agonistics and democracy, which she has elaborated at length in several books and articles. I will give a brief overview of her political theory at large before I turn more specifically to her views on critical art.

Mouffe's theory of agonistics and democracy centres on the criticism of a common view of democratic politics as a process of consensus through dialogue. She is critical of a 'view which informs the "common sense" in a majority of Western societies' and which she describes in the following way:

> The "free world" has triumphed over communism and, with the weakening of collective identities, a world "without enemies" is now possible. Partisan conflicts are a thing of the past and consensus can now be obtained through dialogue. Thanks to globalization and the universalization of liberal democracy, we can expect a cosmopolitan future bringing peace, prosperity and the implementation of human rights worldwide (2005: 1).

According to Mouffe, such visions of a cosmopolitan world free of conflict are an illusion. She argues against views of Western liberal democracy as universal, and she is critical of envisaging the goals of democracy as creating consensus based on rational decisions. To her, 'envisaging the aim of democratic politics in terms of consensus and reconciliation is not only conceptually mistaken, it is also fraught with dangers' (2005: 2). Mouffe argues that such

dangers occur because consensus always hides conflicts, which, if they are not dealt with within the frames of democracy, will find un-democratic escape valves such as the growth of extremism. Mouffe's theory of agonistics is therefore a theory of democracy that attempts to preserve conflict and pluralism within the frames of democracy.

The important theoretical point in Mouffe's descriptions of Western democracy is that antagonism cannot be eradicated from human relations. To Mouffe, there is a 'dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations', and she calls this dimension of human relations 'the political' (2005a: 101).[2] It is this dimension of antagonism that Mouffe argues is concealed when democracy is seen as a rational process of creating consensus. Mouffe, in contrast, argues that antagonism in human relations can never be completely erased, and therefore, any form of consensus is the result of hegemony. As she puts it: 'We have to accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that it always entails some form of exclusion' (2005a: 104). To Mouffe, the idea that democracy leads to consensus through rational debates and decisions is an illusion because every consensus involves hegemony, meaning the preference of one view and the exclusion of others.

For Mouffe, democracy needs to be reconceptualised if its true nature is to be understood. She introduces a different understanding of democracy that in her writings goes under several names, such as 'agonistics', 'pluralist democracy' and 'radical democracy'. Her main argument is that political conflicts need to be reframed: they should be seen neither as

[2] As opposed to 'politics', which she defines as 'the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'' (2005a: 101). 'Politics', then, is the practices that organise 'the political'.

dialogue which leads to consensus, nor as conflicts between enemies. Rather, political conflicts should be viewed in terms of agonism: a battle between what Mouffe calls adversaries, which she defines as groups with completely different views and interests but who nevertheless recognise each other's right to fight for their views and interests. Mouffe explains her point in the following way:

> While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognise the legitimacy of their opponents. They are 'adversaries' not enemies. This means that, while in conflict, they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place (2005b: 20).

Thus, in Mouffe's vision, democracy is a system where different interests are fiercely contested, but where the forms of the contestation are shared and agreed upon. The interests and views that are argued about can be widely different and oppositional, they can be completely opposite hegemonic projects, they can even have different interpretations of the structures of democracy, but they all share a view of other groups' right to exist and legitimately advance divergent intellectual and political views. As Mouffe puts it:

> What liberal democratic politics requires is that the others are not seen as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas might be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas is not questioned. To put it another way, what is important is that conflict does not take the form of an 'antagonism' (struggle between enemies) but the form of an 'agonism' (struggle between adversaries) (2013: 7).

Democracy then, is not consensus over issues, but rather a system of practices and discourses where issues can be debated. To Mouffe, the next step for democracy is to develop such

agonistic practices and discourses: 'the task for democratic theorists and politicians should be to envisage the creation of a vibrant 'agonistic' public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted' (2005b: 2). Democracy should not eradicate difference and conflict through rational consensus but develop an agonistic space where different hegemonic projects can clash within the democratic frames.

Mouffe's vision of agonism and of a pluralist democracy has consequences for how the political potential of art is viewed, something which Mouffe reflects on in her writings. Because Mouffe sees all human relations as having an antagonistic, and therefore political, dimension, she also finds that it is impossible to differ between political art and non-political art. She argues:

> One cannot make a distinction between political art and non-political art, because every form of artistic practice either contributes to the reproduction of the given common sense – and in that sense is political – or contributes to the deconstruction or critique of it. Every form of art has a political dimension (Mouffe in Deutsche, Joseph and Keenan, 2001: 99).

The kinds of art Mouffe values most are those which contribute to the deconstruction or critique of hegemonic structures. This is the kind of art that she calls 'critical art', and she sees it as having an important role to play within agonistic democracy. She argues: 'According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate' (2007, unpaginated). To sum up, Mouffe sees all art as political, because all art is related to the given common sense and hegemonic order. However, art becomes critical when it contributes not to the constitution and reproduction of hegemony, but to the deconstruction and critique of it. Critical art creates agonistic discourses where a multitude of issues and views are presented and discussed, and where the hegemonic orders of society are constantly challenged. In this

thesis, I will explore to what extent the theatrical productions I discuss fulfil Mouffe's ideals of critical art by analysing their relation to hegemony, whether they support hegemony or deconstruct and critique it. In my analysis, I will focus particularly on three points that Mouffe discusses in relation to critical art: disrupting hegemony, forming collective identities, and constructing an agonistic public space. However, before I introduce these three points in more depth, I will give a brief overview of other theories on how theatre, and particularly directors' theatre and its engagement with canonical texts, can be seen as having a critical attitude towards both the canon, the values the canon holds and the hegemonic structures the canon participates in constructing.

1.1.3 Theatre and the canon – a critical potential?

The concept of the canon, as I have described it above, principally relates to literature and literary studies. However, the canon is present in text-based theatre, working as it does through the plays and texts that are chosen for performance. There are at least two particular points to note when considering the relationship between the canon and the theatre: first, that theatre participates in constituting the canon through the selection of repertoire, and second, that theatre also has the potential to critically engage with the canon through productions. In this subsection, I will discuss these two relations between theatre and canon.

As noted above, a selection process is always involved in canon formation. John Guillory emphasises how this selection process has social and institutional dimensions:

> An individual's judgement that a work is great does nothing in itself to preserve that work, unless that judgement is made in a certain institutional context, a setting in which it is possible to insure the *reproduction* of the work, its continual reintroduction to generations of readers (1994: 16).

In the theatre, this social or institutional side of canon formation is particularly clear. It is only through continuous inclusion in the repertoire that dramatic texts become part of a theatrical canon of plays. Because any theatre institution or company only provides limited repertoire, only comparably few plays are performed. Steven Z. Athanases describes this process as follows: 'Directors of productions (…) bring particular works into "the orbit of attention." Through choices made, these directors (…) certify and endorse particular texts' (1991: 117). In the theatre, directors, producers and theatre companies create and confirm the canon through choosing which texts to produce, and such choices are not least governed by financial reasoning. An example is how Shakespeare's plays are regularly produced today while only a very limited selection of plays by his contemporaries are regularly produced, particularly outside the UK. Thus, in the theatre, a set of canonical dramatic texts, like Shakespeare's, is formed through the selection of repertoire.

Because only a limited set of plays are regularly performed on stage, one could argue that the theatrical canon of plays is even narrower and more confined than the broader literary canon. However, there is another way in which the theatre deals with the canon, which potentially engages with the canon in challenging ways. Gorak argues that an important feature of canonical works is that they become 'the receptacle for all kinds of interpretations' (2014: 63). Works are canonical, according to this argument, because they are available for interpretation and used in new contexts. This process of re-interpretation is clear in the theatre, and perhaps particularly in the kind of directors' theatre I study, where the artwork that is created is not just a reproduction of the text, but rather a reimagining and recreation. Sharon Friedman argues that contemporary feminist theatre 'challenges the notion that the classic, having attained almost mythic stature, contains transcendent truths to be applied uncritically to ever new historical conditions' (2008: 2). Instead, she argues, such 'productions transcend reproduction and adaptation to become theatrical dialogues with their

source texts' (2008: 1). I would argue that Friedman's description of feminist theatre can be valid for other types of theatre, for example for directors' theatre where the director negotiates and engages with the text to create a new artwork. Theatrical productions are not necessarily just reproductions of texts, but they can also engage critically with the textual material, comment on it and question it, and thus directors can create the kind of 'theatrical dialogues' Friedman suggests. To further explore this potential, I will outline two concepts developed by Beverly Whitaker Long and by Peter Boenisch respectively, on the relationship between text and performance in the theatre.

Whitaker Long gives a useful account of different ways in which performances can negotiate texts. She describes four categories of performance, one of which she calls 'arguing':

> *Arguing*, the fourth category, also includes several related acts: *commenting, questioning, judging* and *critiquing*. Instead of exploring the text (as in reporting), mediating the text (as in evoking), or experiencing the text (as in enacting), performers metaphorically hold the written text at arm's length and perform their own commentary on it, pose their own questions to it. The effect of this performance is the creation or production of another text. Although the performance as argument is obligated to another prior text for its cause or inspiration in a new articulation, performers no longer submit to that prior work; they perform their own judgment on behalf of or against it (1991: 111).

According to Whitaker Long, there is a category of performance which instead of just reporting, evoking or enacting the text, actually enters into dialogue with it. The text is not taken for granted as basis for performance, but the theatre production comments on and asks questions of the textual material. A similar notion can be found in the term 'Regie', which Peter Boenisch has developed to denote a directorial practice where playtexts from the past

are mediated for the contemporary theatrical situation. Boenisch describes how Regie involves engaging with playtexts in complex ways that facilitate creating meaning on several levels. He argues:

> [Through Regie,] the true 'meaning' of a theatre production is no longer located in the interpretation (or, even more banal: the 'staging') of the playtext, and even less so in the intangible intention of the director. Instead, it emerges from the quintessentially public encounter facilitated through *Regie* and its reflexive relations: an encounter with cultural traditions and registers of cultural memory, but ultimately also an encounter with ourselves as spectators, in a most 'sensible' manner' (2015: 22).

The practice of Regie facilitates theatrical experiences where meaning is located, not solely in the text of the past or in an interpretation of this text, but in the meeting between the text, the director and the audience in the theatre situation. Boenisch also emphasises that this gives Regie a special potential for staging 'dissensus', a potential 'emerging from within the very process of mediation as it frames and potentially reframes our sensory perception. This inherent capability of dissensus marks the difference between 'mere directing' and *Regie*' (2015: 23). Instead of limiting the meaning of a production of a canonical play to the actual interpretation or staging, Regie opens the text and the theatrical situation up to a plethora of (often conflicting) meanings. In this way, Regie also relates to Mouffe's view of critical art, which I have discussed above, because Regie facilitates dissensus and encourages a range of meanings to be played out in the theatrical situation.

Seen as a process of Regie, directors' theatre has a potential for not only staging but also critically engaging with the canon, in ways similar to Whitaker Long's descriptions of 'arguing performance'. Strategies like the ones presented by Whitaker Long and Boenisch make it possible for the theatre to have a critical potential in relation to the canon. While the amount of different texts that are performed in the theatre are often limited and thus constitute

a restricted canonical list, these texts are not necessarily treated like Gorak's 'list of basic authorities' but as points of departure for contemporary theatrical experiences. The theatre I discuss in this thesis is not uncritically accepting of the canon, but rather interrogates and enters into dialogue with it in ways similar to the visions of Friedman and Whitaker Long.

In this subsection, I have shown that the theatre both constitutes and challenges the canon. The theatre contributes to the formation and reproduction of the canon, and because of this, theatrical productions of canonical texts can be seen as instrumental in reproducing and revalidating the ideologies and values of the canon. However, as both Whitaker Long and Boenisch suggest, theatre can also interfere with the textual material, comment on it, question and challenge it and stage the dissensus developed from such interferences. By using strategies similar to Whitaker Long's 'arguing performances' the theatre has a potential for subverting the ideologies of the canon. Thus, theatrical productions of canonical plays have a certain potential for the kind of counter-hegemonic practices that Mouffe envisages as central to critical art. In the following, I will return to Mouffe and outline three areas in which theatrical productions of canonical plays can be counter-hegemonic. These three areas will form the primary framework in analysing the political implications of the productions I study.

1.1.4 Chantal Mouffe, part two: Three points for critical art

In this thesis – which explores the political implications and potentials of directors' engagement with canonical texts – I use Mouffe's definition of critical art as my central organising concept. I will explore how the theatrical productions under consideration relate to her concept of critical art, particularly in relation to three points made by Mouffe: the disruption of hegemony, the formation of collective identities, and the facilitation of agonistic public spaces.

Disrupting hegemony. As mentioned, Mouffe sees the critical potential of art in art's ability to foment dissensus and disrupt hegemony. Questioning the extent to which the productions deconstruct hegemony and dominant ideology by questioning, challenging and critiquing hegemonic structures helps to asses the political potential of theatre. Mouffe articulates art's potential to work against hegemony in terms of 'resistance':

> I am convinced that artistic and cultural practices can offer spaces of resistance that undermine the social imaginary necessary for capitalist reproduction. But I think that to apprehend their political potential, we should visualize forms of artistic resistance as agonistic interventions within the context of counter-hegemonic struggles (2013: 8).

For Mouffe then, art's political potential lies in its capacity to become counter-hegemonic. In her view, critical art intervenes against dominant ideologies, not necessarily to eradicate and replace them - which would only create new hegemonies – but to make dominant ideologies and power structures visible and provide discussions about and alternatives to them. The concept of providing alternatives to hegemony is important for the way Mouffe envisages how art's counter-hegemonic practices should work:

> The agonistic approach sees critical art as constituted by a manifold of artistic practices bringing to the fore the existence of alternatives to the current post-political order. Its critical dimension consists in making visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate, in giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony (2013: 92-93).

Mouffe's vision of art, and its political dimensions, relates not to its direct interference in political issues, but to its ability in making alternatives to dominant cultural hegemony visible.

If 'critical art' consists, as Mouffe suggests, of disrupting hegemony and ideology, it is worth, at this point, to take a brief detour from Mouffe to explore what the relationship

between theatre and ideology might be. One understanding of this relationship that resonates with Mouffe's 'critical art', is made by Louis Althusser in the essay 'The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht'. Althusser suggests that there is a specific ideological relationship between theatre and society in that theatre at all points participates in constructing and sustaining the ideological foundations of society. However, Althusser is critical of how theatre makes audiences unknowingly and uncritically 'buy into' its ideological framework:

> [T]his uncriticized ideology [is] simply the 'familiar', 'well-known', transparent myths in which a society or an age can recognize itself (but not know itself), the mirror it looks into for self-recognition, precisely the mirror it must break if it is to know itself (2005: 144).

Althusser suggests that in theatre, society recognises its own ideological structures, but importantly, he suggests that when the ideology of theatre goes uncriticised, ideology will only be recognised and accepted and this process will not lead to a more critical attitude that will make society 'know itself'. Like Brecht, whom he discusses in the essay, Althusser is critical of a view that sees the relationship between theatre and audience as one of psychological identification. He argues that audiences identify with the ideological content of a play before they identify psychologically with its characters and situations:

> Indeed, before (psychologically) identifying itself with the hero, the spectatorial consciousness recognizes itself in the ideological content of the play (…) Before becoming the occasion for an identification (an identification with self in the species of another), the performance is, fundamentally, the occasion for a cultural and ideological recognition (2005: 149).

For Althusser, the ideological recognition is the first impact of theatre. Before any conscious identification or interpretation can take place, audiences will unconsciously – and therefore uncritically – identify with the ideological content and structures of a theatrical performance.

However, Althusser emphasises that such ideological identification leads to recognition but not knowledge. For theatre to provide society with opportunities of 'knowing itself', ideology must not go uncriticised; it must be made visible, explored, questioned and challenged. Althusser's understanding of theatre's ideological impact on an audience is useful in relation to Mouffe's theory of 'critical art' because it shows how theatre participates in, constructs and upholds ideological hegemonies. Taking Althusser's arguments into account, it becomes possible to see how disrupting audiences' unconscious and uncritical identification with the ideology of theatre can be a form of art's counter-hegemonic struggle as Mouffe envisages. In my analysis of contemporary productions of canonical texts throughout this thesis, I will explore and discuss to what extent they reproduce hegemony and dominant ideology, or whether the productions disrupt audience identification with hegemonic ideology and begin to question and challenge hegemonic order through suggesting alternative orders and prioritising alternative voices.

'Collective identities' is an important term in Mouffe's concept of an agonistic or pluralist democracy. In her understanding of collective identities, Mouffe is, as is the case for many other aspects of her thinking, inspired by the German political philosopher Carl Schmitt. Mouffe argues, as Schmitt does, that 'the criteria of the political, its *differentia specifica*, is the friend/enemy discrimination. It deals with the formation of a 'we' as opposed to a 'they' and is always concerned with collective forms of identification' (2005b: 11). For Mouffe, when we talk of 'the political', we talk of the way collective identities and their interests are constituted and negotiated. The antagonistic battles and agonistic conflicts that constitute what Mouffe calls 'the political' are always concerned with the interests of groups of people who share collective identifications. As Mouffe puts it: 'I always insist that to act politically is to act as part of an "us," to act from the position of a "we"' (Miessen and Mouffe, 2012: 63). A central issue for Mouffe is therefore how collective identities are

formed, and what kinds of collective identities, what kinds of 'we' and 'us', are constituted. Mouffe argues that one of the most central conditions of democracy is that it is possible for people to group together in different collective identities that provide real choice and alternatives, but who also share a common belief in the values and principles of democracy.

With regards to how collective identities are formed, Mouffe is adamant that collective identities are not created through rational deliberation, but through the mobilisation of human 'affects' or 'passions': 'allegiance to the principles of the particular demos [collective identity] is not purely intellectual. (…) There is always an element of affect, a mobilization of affect or a mobilization of passions' (Mouffe in Deutsche, Joseph and Keenan, 2001: 112). One problem with the view of democracy as a process of rational deliberation that Mouffe criticises is that it excludes this affectual or passionate dimension of human social relations. Mouffe argues that one cannot exclude passion from the political. Instead, one has to engage with human passions in order to form democratic collective identifications. As she puts it:

> The prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions or to relegate them to the private sphere in order to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere. Rather, it is to 'sublimate' those passions by mobilizing them towards democratic designs, by creating collective forms of identification around democratic objectives (2013: 9).

This quote begins to answer the issue of what kinds of collective identities Mouffe envisages for an agonistic democracy. She argues that we need to establish collective identities that can disagree on issues, but that nevertheless are founded on democratic principles. This ties in with the transformation from antagonism to agonism that I have discussed above: Mouffe argues for the importance of constituting and making available different collective identities that are real adversaries in the hegemonic struggle, but that nevertheless view other collective identities as legitimate agents in this struggle. What is needed for the realisation of the

agonistic model of democracy is an engagement with human passions or affects in ways that form collective identities founded on democratic principles.

One way in which art and theatre can contribute to democracy, then, is to use its power to mobilise human passions towards democratic objectives. This is also something Mouffe discusses in relation to her view of critical art: 'Once we accept that identities are never pre-given but that they are always the result of processes of identification, that they are discursively constructed, the question that arises is the type of identity that critical artistic practices should aim at fostering' (2007, unpaginated). Thus, Mouffe argues that because collective identities are unstable and constantly need to be created and recreated, one way for art to, as she puts it, 'contribute to questioning the dominant hegemony', is to mobilise passions towards new collective identities (2007, unpaginated). Mouffe sees critical art as art that both questions hegemonic constructions of identity and constructs new collective identities, particularly identities around democratic principles. Critical art should give room for dissensus and contribute to form an agonistic manifold of collective identities. In this thesis, I use Mouffe's notion of 'collective identities' as one way of exploring the political implications and potential of the theatrical productions I study. I explore what kind of collective identities the theatrical productions I study prioritise and constitute and whether these productions question hegemonic identities and constitute new identities.

Agonistic Public Space. As part of her descriptions of agonistic democracy, Mouffe also describes the agonistic approach to public space, which she argues differs from other influential concepts of the public space or the public sphere. Mouffe explains that '[a]ccording to the accepted view, the public space is the terrain where one aims at creating consensus', referencing Jürgen Habermas as a representative of such a view (2013: 92). Indeed, Habermas explores the bourgeois public sphere, which he argues was characterised by the use of rational argument to reach consensus. For example, he argues: '*Public debate was*

supposed to transform voluntas *into a* ratio *that in the public competition of private arguments came into being as the consensus about what was practically necessary in the interest of all*' (1991: 83, italics in original). The bourgeois public sphere, according to Habermas, is where public debate transformes the will of the individual towards consensus. This view, then, sees consensus, agreement and the solving of conflicts as the goal of public sphere and political life, a view that is directly opposite to Mouffe's description of an agonistic public space. Mouffe explicitly argues against Habermas' understanding of democracy and of the public space, particularly because of its emphasis on consensus. Instead of being based on consensus, in Mouffe's agonistic approach, 'the public space is where conflicting points of view are confronted without any possibility of a final reconciliation' (2013: 92). As Mouffe envisages it, public space is not where consensus is reached but where views are presented, debated, fought out and defended in order to secure representation for the manifold views on how social justice should be achieved and the governing of society should happen. Art plays a particular role in such a public space, because of its potential for, as mentioned, 'making visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate, [and for] giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony' (2013: 93). Art can contribute to the public space by bringing into play the voices and views that are normally obscured in the existing hegemony, and by facilitating a meeting between opposing points of view.

Mouffe's description of an agonistic public space is the third and final point I explore to analyse the democratic potential of directors' theatre's engagement with canonical texts. I focus particularly on Mouffe's description of the agonistic public space because I believe it has specific importance for the theatre. The theatre is already a public space where people come together. In a reflection on Brecht's concepts for a political theatre, Boenisch argues

that it is not only the actor behind the character that is made visible in Brechtian theatre, but also the public behind the audience:

> As important as making visible the actor behind the character is the visibility of the public behind the audience; by this, I refer to the engagement of the audience members not only in their role as spectators within the theatrical communication, but as members of a public sphere that extends far beyond the walls of the theatre into 'real life'. As a result, the purely fictional play makes the gaps in our 'everyday' ideological fantasy experientially and affectively tangible (2017: 85).

Boenisch's reflection on Brecht is relevant to my discussion of art's political potential. Theatre is an important public/political space. Audiences are not merely passive recipients in this context; contributing as they do to the dynamics of the performance as members of the public. By taking seriously its role as a public space and engaging with the idological structures it sits within, theatre makes 'everyday ideology' visible and thereby also encourages audiences to reflect on society and its hegemonic structures. My hypothesis is that theatre, including productions of canonical texts, can become more than simply a space of consensus and confirmation, but can also be an agonistic space where issues are explored, questioned, challenged and critiqued without the goal of agreement, solution and consensus. Specifically, with regards to canonical plays, I want to investigate if and how theatrical productions can use the plays to investigate and challenge ideologies and values present in the canon and in society more general, and also invite the audience to participate in such processes. If this is the case, the theatre might be a space where democracy and agonistics can be rehearsed and performed, where audiences can meet their 'everyday ideology' and critically engage with it. I will explore whether and how a select number of contemporary theatrical productions realise the democratic potential of the public space Mouffe describes, and whether it brings alternatives to 'everyday ideology' into the orbit of the public space.

In this subsection, I have introduced three points that will be my main focus when I analyse the political implications of the productions I study through Mouffe's ideals for critical art. Throughout the thesis, I will refer to these elements of Mouffe's theory in a close exploration of various different productions. In the last chapter of the thesis, the three points form the basis of three subsections that explore the political implications of the productions.

1.1.5 Contextualising my research

As noted above, much has been written on the canon and on directors' theatre, but less scholarly work has been written about how canonical plays are produced in contemporary directors' theatre. It is striking that so little of the important academic work that has been done on the ideological implications of the canon has made its way into mainstream theatre. In the theatre, canonical plays seem to be an important and obvious part of the repertoire, and questions are rarely raised about what kind of ideological act the theatre's reproduction of canonical texts is. This is not to say that no scholarly work has been done on canonical texts and on canonicity in contemporary theatre. A particularly important scholarly field in this respect is the field of Greek classics and their reception in the theatre, where several scholars have explored how the canonical status of ancient Greek plays are negotiated in contemporary performance. Examples of such scholars are Edith Hall, Margherita Laera and Eleftheria Iannidou. Laera, for example, is critical of the way the Greek canon has been used to constitute hegemonic 'Western' and 'European' identities, particularly around mythologies of democracy and community. Laera argues that 'it is possible to critique these mythologies through performance, though sadly this is not often the case in contemporary productions' (2013: 3). Instead, she argues, '[t]heatre plays a key role in perpetuating these mythologies; it is a place where the notions of 'Europe' and 'West' can be collectively imagined and disseminated, either challenging or reinforcing dominant discourses' (2013: 9). Laera's

insights are important, because she points to how the canon always constitutes hegemonic structures and identifications, and, while performances have the possibility to challenge and negotiate such structures and identifications, such possibilities are rarely exploited. In this thesis, I explore whether a selection of contemporary European directors begin to challenge and negotiate the hegemony of the canon through their productions, not of ancient Greek plays, but of plays by Shakespeare, Ibsen and Brecht. Thus, I hope to contribute to investigations of the relationship between theatre and the canon; an emerging and important sub-field.

Numerous studies focus on performances of plays by the three canonical authors I study (Shakespeare, Ibsen and Brecht). This is particularly true of Shakespeare – with Shakespeare Performance Studies occupying a sub-field in its own right. Whilst studies of Shakespeare in performance feature subtly different points of focus, they often concentrate on the performance or appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in different cultures from the ones they were written in, sometimes adopting a postcolonial approach. An example of a collection with a wide scope is *Shakespeare in Performance* (Shaughnessy, 2000), while *World-Wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance* (Massai, 2005) is an example of a work with a more explicit multi-cultural focus. Some studies focus specifically on Shakespeare's dramas in relation to directors' theatre. The clearest example is *The Routledge Companion to Directors' Shakespeare* (Brown, 2008), which consists of chapters on specific directors' relations to Shakespeare throughout the twentieth-century. Although studies of a specific author in performance are most common within Shakespeare studies, examples can also be found of studies of other canonical authors. Ibsen has, for example, been the subject of at least two important performance studies of recent years: *Global Ibsen: Performing Multiple Modernities* (Fischer-Lichte, Gronau and Weiler, 2011) and *Ibsen in Practice: Relational Readings of Performance, Cultural Encounters and Power* (Helland, 2015). These studies of

Shakespeare and Ibsen in performance often demonstrate how the texts travel around the world and constitute the basis for theatrical experiences in different cultures. Studies of Brecht's plays in performance are less common than those of Shakespeare's and Ibsen's plays. What can be found, however, are studies focusing on Brecht's theories of theatre and how they are or can be utilised in contemporary performance. The most prominent of these in recent years is perhaps David Barnett's *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance* (2015). Barnett's and other similar works show the importance of Brecht as a theoretician of theatre and performance for several different forms of contemporary theatrical works. All the studies noted above attempt to explore how the playwright in question is produced and reproduced around the world. They all explore what the works of Shakespeare, Ibsen and Brecht have meant and still mean to different people and in different cultural contexts.

My thesis shares a similar goal to the publications above in that I also am interested in what these playwrights and their texts can mean in different contemporary contexts. However, I focus specifically on the canonical status of the three authors, and how not only their plays, but this canonical status is negotiated in contemporary performance. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Williams argues that canonical texts are tied to the culture they originated in and are unavailable as the basis for contemporary artworks, while Danan argues that in theatrical production such texts nevertheless resonate in the language of the contemporary stage. In this thesis, I investigate a kind of theatre that blurs the lines between Williams' and Danan's arguments. I explore the work of directors who work explicitly with the canonical status of plays and who in many instances interrogate and challenge the ideological implications of the canon in their stagings. I study theatrical productions that include the canonicity of the plays explicitly on stage. In these productions, neither the historical aspects of the plays nor their contemporary resonances are erased, but instead past and present, the canon and the contemporary, are continuously negotiated. I argue that

productions that use such strategies of explicitly negotiating canonicity can begin to question and challenge the ideological implications of the canon, opening up reflections on, and challenges to, hegemonic structures in society. I also hope that my investigations will begin to apply some of the objections against the canon that I have described; revealing how the canon is constituted, treated and (re)produced in the theatre. This is a significant task because as long as the theatre continues to reproduce the texts of the canon, it is important to ask not only why such texts continue to be reproduced but also what kind of ideological acts such reproduction constitutes. This thesis explores and attempts to answer such questions in relation to the work of six specific directors and three specific canonical authors, which will be presented further below.

Another way in which I seek to fill a gap in the scholarly field is through my use of Mouffe's theories to discuss directors' theatre's engagement with canonical texts. Mouffe's theories are popular in contemporary discussions of culture and society, and I am not the first to connect her notions of agonism to a discussion of art and its political implications. Not only is art one of the subjects Mouffe regularly discusses in her writings, but other scholars have also used her theories in discussions of art and of particular artistic practices. Some have applied these to the specific context of theatre and performance. A particularly significant contribution is the collection *Performing Antagonism. Theatre, Performance and Radical Democracy* edited by Tony Fisher and Eve Katsouraki (2017). The essays in this collection explore a wide range of performance practices and their relation to the concept of antagonism, and particularly they pose the question of how theatre and performance can be political. Several of the contributions draw on Mouffe's writing, because, as Goran Petrovic Lotina claims in his article, 'Mouffe's agonistic model of democratic politics enables the possibility of understanding how art (…) is able to contest and transform the dominant neo-liberal politics – their hegemonised institutions, sedimented social practices, and determined

representations' (2017: 251). Thus, the collection points to Mouffe because it is claimed that her understanding of art in relation to the antagonistic nature of the political is particularly useful for our time. I agree with this point, and I hope to contribute to the discussions around how theatre's political implications can be understood through Mouffe's theory of agonism and radical democracy and to widen the discussion by focusing specifically on theatrical productions of canonical texts. Particularly, I believe that Mouffe's theories are useful for discussing if and how productions of the canon, which, as I have described above, is embedded in hegemonic ideology, can have a significant political impact in the contemporary context. By using Mouffe's theories to analyse contemporary productions of canonical texts, I therefore both expand the current interest in the connection between art and agonism to a new artistic field, while I also discuss contemporary productions of Shakespeare, Ibsen and Brecht in ways that only to a limited extent have been done before.

Finally, my project is original because of its comparative nature, and I want to emphasise how I follow a comparative approach in two particular ways. First, I have chosen not to divide the thesis into chapters that each focus on specific canonical authors. Instead, I approach the three authors I am focusing on – Shakespeare, Ibsen and Brecht – comparatively. As can be seen from the brief overview of studies of plays by Shakespeare, Ibsen and Brecht in performance above, most such studies focus specifically on the works of one specific author. In choosing a comparative approach, I treat Shakespeare, Ibsen and Brecht as representatives of the theatrical canon of plays, and the comparative nature of my study will enable me to investigate how this canon is treated in contemporary theatre and how canonical texts of the past resonate in contemporary situations.

The second way in which my thesis is comparative in nature is in its treatment of the six directors that are my case studies. Much has been written about directors' theatre since, as I mentioned above, Bradby and Williams coined the term in 1988. This body of scholarship

includes historical overviews of the practice of directing and the role of the director, such as Maria Shevtsova and Christopher Innes' *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing* (2013), and more theoretical explorations of the role of the director and/or the phenomenon of directing in general, including Avra Sidiropoulou's *Authoring Performance. The Director in Contemporary Theatre* (2011), Simon Shepherd's *Direction. Reading in Theatre Practice* (2012), and Peter Boenisch's *Directing Scenes and Senses. The Thinking of Regie* (2015). Studies of particular directors are also numerous, either with several chapters covering different directors within the same volume or whole volumes devoted to the work of one specific director. *Contemporary European Theatre Directors*, edited by Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato (2010), is a much-cited example of the former, while Peter Boenisch and Thomas Ostermeier's joint effort *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier* (2016) is a recent example of the latter. Such studies often base themselves on interviews with the directors in question, either by publishing interviews directly or by basing the texts on interviews. This practice of interviewing directors is a research method I will draw heavily on in my project as well (as I discuss below). However, many works on directors' theatre, including some of those mentioned above, often treat directors individually in individual chapters. Thus, their focus is often on the methods and work of specific directors; a practice that minimises the comparative potential of considering other methods, other works, other directors and other contexts. In contrast to this, Sidiropoulou, Shepherd and Boenisch, who I mention above, all, from different perspectives, discuss the practice of directing in broad terms, and particularly they analyse the relationship between the written play of the author and the work of the director in the theatre. While claiming, as Boenisch does that 'there can be no general principle of 'directing'', these studies all attempt to describe what directing is or can be in general and theoretical terms, and rely less on specific case studies (although some case studies are included) (2015: 10). My thesis builds on such scholarship on directors' theatre. I

also rely heavily on case studies of six directors (to be further presented below), but I attempt to approach the directors I discuss as comparatively as possible throughout the thesis. I have chosen not to divide my thesis into chapters that each focus on a specific director, but rather to compare the different directors' approach to canonical texts throughout the chapters. By continuously comparing the directors' approaches to canonical texts I hope to be able to point to some trends in these directors' works and some strategies they share, particularly around how the six directors not only reproduce but also interrogate and challenge the canon and that they put this interrogation and challenge explicitly on stage. My study therefore aims to define, analyse and discuss ways in which contemporary directors directly use canonicity on stage and what such strategies do in the contemporary theatrical and cultural situation, and I compare how such strategies are employed by different directors and in different contexts.

To sum up, my project advances knowledge and is original both in its content, focusing specifically on the relation between the canon and directors' theatre, and specifically on how directors utilise canonicity on stage, in its theoretical approach in that it expands the discussion of Mouffe's view on art to new theatrical contexts, and in its comparative nature, both in relation to canonical authors and to the study of the directors.

1.2 The scope of the thesis

In this section on the scope of the thesis, I will explain how I intend to narrow down the research focus. I have stated that I will study how the canon is treated in contemporary European directors' theatre. However, this is too wide a topic, and I have narrowed down my scope both geographically, in relation to canonical authors, and in relation to the directors I have chosen to study.

1.2.1 Geographical demarcation

In this study I do not intend to focus on European theatre as a whole. Instead I focus on directors working in three Western European countries: the UK, Germany and Norway. I would argue that these countries make a relevant basis for my investigation of how canonical texts are produced in contemporary directors' theatre. Traditionally, there have been clear differences in the approaches to 'directing' and the role of the director and the text in British and Continental (and particularly German) theatre traditions. In general terms, British theatre has traditionally seen directing as process of facilitating the text for the stage. As Peter Boenish argues: 'From an English perspective, the idea of 'directing texts' can only be understood as pragmatism of efficient blocking and the smooth organisation of the text's proper enunciation and representation, measured by its conformity to the pre-written script' (2015: 3). According to Boenisch, then, British theatre has mainly seen the director as lower in the theatrical hierarchy than the text and the playwright, and the director's work has consisted in releasing the text and the playwright's intentions on stage. Contrastingly, the director has traditionally had a freer role in Continental, and perhaps particularly in German, theatre. Here, directing is seen as a dialogue with the text, where the director stages the text but also challenges it and reworks it into a new and different theatrical work of art. As Boenisch puts it: 'From a Continental theatre perspective (…) it has become utterly unimaginable that one would not break free from the authority of the text, not rethink the play afresh with every new reading and not 'make a performance' of the text with each new production' (2015: 3). In the Continental perspective, directing is less about putting texts on stage than it is about using texts to create theatrical performances. Thus, we see oppositional views where on the 'British side' the director is seen as working for the text, while on the 'German side' the text is seen as a source of inspiration for the director. It is, however, important to note that these are general observations and not solid categorisations. However,

because the practice of 'directing plays' is understood differently in the British and the continental tradition, investigating how the canon is treated in both traditions opens up more complex answers to my research questions. The Norwegian theatre tradition contributes to this complexity by inhabiting a middle position. In Norwegian theatre, textual traditions have stood strong, particularly with staging traditions going back to Ibsen, but in recent years, less text-centred influences from the continent have been incorporated. Leinslie and Pettersen, for example, claim that 'during the last 15 years Norwegian theatre has experienced a great influence from the German Director's Theatre' (2015: 14). Norwegian theatre is therefore a useful complement to an analysis of German and British theatre conventions because it represents a melting pot of both text-centred and director-centred traditions. A final point needs to be made regarding Norway: both British and German theatre traditions have been studied quite extensively in anglophone scholarship. The same cannot be said for Scandinavian and Norwegian theatre, although Frederick and Lise Lone Marker's *A History of Scandinavian Theatre* is an important exception (1996). I hope to contribute to expanding scholarship on Norwegian theatre in the anglophone world.

1.2.2 The Authors

The focus on three specific countries allows me to narrow down my study of canonical texts to three specific authors: William Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen and Bertolt Brecht. The three authors are all important figures in the European canon; both on a literary level, through for example school curriculums, and because their plays are continuously performed in the theatre. All three are also important canonical figures in the cultural consciousness of their countries of origin. However, the canonical status of Shakespeare in the UK and Ibsen in Norway is different from the canonical status of Brecht in Germany. Keld Hyldig describes Ibsen's position in Norwegian theatre in the following way:

> Since the first production of *Peer Gynt* at Christiania Theatre back in 1876, which was a great success and also attracted attention abroad, Ibsen's dramas have been a cornerstone in the repertoire of Norwegian theatre. Virtually all of Ibsen's plays have, since their inception, been performed over and over again in new productions at Norwegian theatre institutions (2011: 21).

According to Hyldig, Ibsen is in many ways the defining feature of Norwegian theatre that other writers, plays, productions and styles are measured against. For example, when successful playwright Jon Fosse rose to international acclaim in the 1990s and early 2000s, he was quickly named a 'new Ibsen' (Lund, 2000). Thus, the Norwegian dramatic and theatrical canon has one major figure that is 'more canonical' than any other; Henrik Ibsen. In the UK, William Shakespeare holds a similar position. The UK has produced many well-known playwrights, but none of them enjoys the same cultural status as Shakespeare. His plays are the most performed, and he is the only playwright who has a Royal Theatre Company named after him. Significantly, the only major theatre in Norway that is named after a person is indeed named after Ibsen: Teater Ibsen in Skien, the town where Ibsen was born. I have chosen to focus on Shakespeare and Ibsen, then, because of the central positions they keep in their respective countries' theatrical cultures and because of their place in the European canon.

Bertolt Brecht has a slightly different position in German and European theatrical culture. While his plays are regularly performed, Brecht does not have the unchallenged central position in the German dramatic canon as Ibsen and Shakespeare do in Norway and the UK. The German equivalents to those figures would probably be Goethe and Schiller. Brecht's plays, on the other hand, are more contemporary so they have not had the time to acquire the same canonical status. In addition, Brecht worked mainly in East Germany, and much of his work and fame was confined in the DDR until the fall of the Berlin Wall.

However, what Brecht lacks with regards to a position within a national canon he gains in his position as pivotal theoretical contributor in much European theatre. This position comes partly from his plays, but mostly from his theoretical writings, which have been an important inspiration for many different movements in European theatre of the last seventy years. Thus, Brecht is a counterpoint to the two other playwrights. His canonicity originates not only in his playwrighting, but also in his theoretical contributions. In this thesis, I study Christopher Rüping's production of Brecht's *Drums in the Night*, performed at the Münchner Kammerspiele in 2017. This production is explored in depth in chapter 5, where I discuss how the production engaged with the canonicity both of Brecht's play and of his theoretical writings.

1.2.3 The Directors

An exploration of six theatre directors and their work, no matter how rigorous and detailed, cannot hope to be either exhaustive or representative as a study of 'European directors' theatre'. I am not attempting in this thesis to define *the* way in which directors work with canonical texts today, simply because there is no such *single* way, or as Peter Boenisch puts it: '[T]here can be no general principle of 'directing', no universal method of organising dramatic texts for their performance *as such*, no normative prescription what it should be and do' (2015: 10). Instead of focusing on directing in general, I will, as mentioned above, focus on how directors deal with canonicity, and I particularly study the works of directors who engage with, interrogate and challenge the canon and its ideologies and values through productions of canonical plays. I have therefore narrowed down my study to focus on six specific directors, two from each of the three countries above, who all in different ways explicitly engage with and negotiate the history and cultural status of canonical plays and playwrights in their stagings. As mentioned, these directors are Alexander Mørk-Eidem and

Sigrid Strøm Reibo from Norway, Joe Hill-Gibbins and Emma Rice from the UK, Christopher Rüping from Germany and Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson from Iceland, who was educated and works mainly in Germany. These directors have been chosen on the basis of several criteria that can be put in three main categories. The first and most important set of criteria relates to how these directors work with the canon and negotiate canonical status in their productions. The second set of criteria is based around previous scholarly engagement, as I have attempted to choose directors whose work only to a limited extent previously has been discussed in academic studies in English. The third set of criteria relate to issues around access. Below, I will discuss how I chose which directors to study more in depth.

The first and most important objective was finding contemporary directors who work extensively with canonical texts, and specifically with texts by Shakespeare, Ibsen and Brecht. It has not necessarily been important to choose directors who have directed productions based on texts by all of the three playwrights, but all directors have directed plays by at least one of the playwrights and often more of them. I discuss productions where the director and the playwright are from the same country, and productions where directors take on authors from different countries. Thus, I hope to explore how the playwrights are treated as part of national canons and how they are seen as part of a Western or European theatrical canon in general, alongside how this canonicity can be directly exploited and even challenged on stage. In addition, it has been important that the directors' engagement with canonical texts, although it might be different, can be described as the director claiming the authorial function in the production. Thus, the work of these directors fits Bradby and Williams' definition of 'directors' theatre', which I discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Finally, and most importantly, all six directors engage in staging strategies that not only reproduce the canon, but that also explicitly play with, negotiate, interrogate and challenge canonical status. The productions I discuss in this thesis can all be related to strategies that seek to not only

reproduce canonical texts, but which also enter into dialogue with them in ways similar to Whitaker Long's concept of 'arguing performance' and Boenisch's concept of 'Regie', which I have discussed above. Throughout this thesis, such strategies of actively interrogating and challenging canonicity will be the main focus point, and it has therefore been important to choose directors that clearly exemplify this way of engaging with canonical plays. Thus, the six directors I study are all in a middle position between reinforcing and challenging the canon and hegemony. On the one hand they are all part of the hegemonic order, in the sense that they are 'white, European, middle class' and make their work in large theatrical institutions that receive public and private funding. They cannot be said to be on the margins of hegemonic culture. On the other hand, these directors are also part of a generation that has to a certain extent 'internalised' a critique of the canon, and they express a wish to not only reproduce, but also question the canon in their work. In this thesis, I study the complex tensions that are caused by both being part of and wanting to critique hegemony.

A brief summary of the directors' careers and of their engagement with canonical texts and canonicity can be given as follows:

- Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson (1978-) studied acting and directing at Iceland Academy of the Arts, before he studied directing at the University of Performing Arts Ernst Busch in Berlin. Since completing his studies, he has directed at several theatres in Germany, including Schauspiel Hannover, Theater Trier and at Hessischen Staatstheater, where he was resident director. He has also worked at the National Theatre in Oslo, Norway and in Iceland. Arnarsson has directed several productions of plays by Shakespeare and Ibsen. For example, at Schauspiel Hannover he directed *Hamlet* (2017) and *Macbeth* (2018), and he opened the International Ibsen Festival in Oslo in 2016 with a production called *Enemy of the Duck* (a combination of *An Enemy of the People* (1882) and *The Wild Duck*

(1884)). Arnarsson's work engages not only with the plays themselves but also with what he calls 'the cultural status' of the plays (2017). His productions are not just reproductions of texts but active critiques of them, in the sense that Arnarsson and his team stage and perform their engagement with, questions to and disagreements with the texts. Thus, his productions encourage an active relationship to the canon that does not take canonical values for granted. Of his productions, I mainly study *Hamlet* at Schauspiel Hanover and *Enemy of the Duck* at the National Theatre in Oslo.

- Joe Hill-Gibbins (1977-) trained at the Royal Court Theatre, where he was both assistant director and worked in the literary office. Since 2006, he has been associated with the Young Vic Theatre where he is an Associate Director. Hill-Gibbins has mainly worked with productions of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and his stagings often directly contrast the values expressed in the canonical plays with contemporary sensibilities. He is interested in both the ways the canon resonates with contemporary sensibilities but also in the ways the canon is different from, and even sometimes out of place in, the contemporary context. He is a director who can be said to break with the British tradition of 'putting on a play' and rather is more in line with continental European directors' theatre, a tradition he explicitly claims to be inspired by. He has recently directed abroad at the Theater Basel. Hill-Gibbins can be seen as a figure between British and continental staging traditions, and I explore how these varied influences play into his treatment of canonicity. I mainly study his production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) at The Young Vic in 2017.
- Alexander Mørk-Eidem (1971-) studied theatre directing at Oslo National Academy of the Arts. For several years he was associated with the National

Theatre in Oslo, before moving to Stockholm, where he worked both at Stockholm City Theatre and the Royal Dramatic Theatre. Mørk-Eidem directed several productions of plays by Ibsen at the National Theatre in Oslo, and he has also directed productions by other canonical playwrights, such as Chekhov. In Norway, he has been part of a movement that has sought to stage Ibsen's plays in inventive ways that breaks with the Norwegian traditions of text-centred, living room based stagings. In his work, Mørk-Eidem often draws striking and blunt parallels between the themes of canonical plays and specific situations in contemporary culture and politics, and thus he seeks to actively explore the relationship between canonical texts of the past and the theatre, culture and society of the present. In this thesis, I study his production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (1867) at the National Theatre in Oslo in 2014, which combined contemporary elements and references with a playful attitude towards both the figure of Ibsen and the play *Peer Gynt* in the Norwegian cultural context.

- Emma Rice (1967-) studied acting at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, before she started performing with and directing for the Cornwall-based company Kneehigh. She was Artistic Director at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre from 2016-2018, and she has also directed at other UK theatres, including at the English National Opera. Rice is currently Artistic Director of her own company Wise Children. In this thesis, I focus on Rice's stagings of Shakespeare's plays at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. Rice's tenure at the Globe has been much debated, but I want to study it from the point of view of a director subverting the norms of reproducing Shakespeare's plays within an institution that largely depends on a traditional view of Shakespeare as a canonical playwright. At the Globe, Rice challenged tradition in many ways, both with regards to Shakespeare's texts and in

relation to the staging strategies of reconstructing Shakespeare's theatrical conditions associated with the Globe. I mainly focus on her production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1601) in 2017 and how this production can be seen as dealing directly with the canonicity of Shakespeare and the Globe in an attempt at making both more accessible to contemporary audiences.

- Cristopher Rüping (1985-) studied directing at Zürich University of the Arts and at the Theatre Academy in Hamburg. He was Associate Director at the Münchner Kammerspiele from 2016-2019, when he moved to Schauspielhaus Zürich. In recent years, several of his works have been voted among the most influential productions in German language theatre and have been invited to the Theatertreffen in Berlin – a festival held every year where the 10 most influential German language productions of that year are shown. He regularly works on canonical plays, including Shakespeare, Ibsen and classical Greek plays. His work deconstructs and rebuilds the plays, making his productions as much comments on the plays as stagings of them. In this way, he attempts to use canonical plays to investigate the values and ideologies of contemporary culture (2017). I focus on two of his productions, *Hamlet* from 2016 and *Drums in the Night* (based on Brecht's play from 1919) from 2017. Rüping interrogated *Hamlet* and questioned its status in the Western canon, while *Drums in the Night* (which is the subject of the in-depth case study of chapter 5 in this thesis) investigated not only the play, but also the first ever staging of that play at the Münchner Kammerspiele 95 years before Rüping's production. I explore how Rüping uses the plays' status and staging history to ask questions both about the plays and theatre's role in society.
- Sigrid Strøm Reibo (1982-) studied theatre directing at The International Amateur Directors Course at the University of Klaipeda, Lithuania and at GITIS (Russian

Institute of Theatre Arts) in Aalborg, Denmark and Moscow, Russia. Since completing her education, she has worked at several theatres in Norway. She is currently Associate Director at the National Theatre in Oslo. Strøm Reibo has won several awards for her stagings of canonical literature such as Molière's *The Misanthrope* (2012) and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (2016). Strøm Reibo works closely with the text, while at the same time reframing the texts in the contemporary context and particularly in the specific conditions of her productions. In this thesis, I focus on her production of *Peer Gynt* at Gålå in Gudbrandsdalen in Norway. The outdoor *Peer Gynt* productions at Gålå have a goal of taking Ibsen's play back to its roots in the Norwegian mountain landscape (the area where the first acts of the play are set), and I discuss how Strøm Reibo engaged with and challenged both the canonical play and this 'authentic setting' in her production.

As this brief summary suggests, and as will become clear throughout this thesis, the six directors I study all work with canonical plays in ways that negotiate, interrogate and challenge their canonical status. Through such strategies the directors seek to disrupt traditional views and interpretations of the canon, and I will explore whether they actually achieve such goals in their productions. I also study whether their strategies contribute to counter-hegemonic practices as defined by Mouffe. As I have suggested above, challenging canonicity through theatrical production can facilitate a critique of the canon and also of the hegemonic ideologies and structures the canon is part of. Because all six directors negotiate canonicity explicitly in their productions, their work is well suited to consider the counter-hegemonic potential of theatrical productions of canonical plays.

In addition to criteria based on the directors' work, it has been important to me to choose directors that have not previously been discussed in comprehensive academic studies.

As I have mentioned above, there are many studies of different European directors available, and I hope to add to these with this study of directors who have not previously been the subject of academic focus. For the Norwegian directors, the case is fairly simple, as little scholarly attention has been paid in English to contemporary Norwegian theatre, and although Mørk-Eidem and Strøm Reibo are important contemporary Norwegian directors, they have not been discussed in English before. With this study, I hope both to throw light upon these two important directors and also contribute to the scarce literature on contemporary Norwegian theatre in English. German theatre is more frequently discussed in English academic contexts both in generally and in terms of individual directors. It has been important to me to choose German directors whose work commands wider attention, but who, at the same time, have not been thoroughly previously discussed in academic scholarship. Christopher Rüping has recently had major success in German theatres, and several of his productions have been presented at Theatertreffen. Similarly, Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson has had great success with several productions. These are directors who are well known in Germany, but less so to English-speaking audiences. I hope to begin to make English audiences and English academics aware of these two directors. Finally, the criterion of previous academic engagement has also been important for selecting the English directors. Joe Hill-Gibbins has directed a comparably small amount of productions, and his work has not been discussed much in academic contexts. Emma Rice has been discussed to a certain extent by academics, but mainly in relation to her work with her company Kneehigh. Her engagement with Shakespeare has to a much smaller extent been the focus of academic studies, and although her tenure at the Globe and its abrupt ending has been extensively debated, I hope that studying Rice in a wider context of directors' theatre engaging with canonical texts can throw a new and different light on her approach to staging Shakespeare's plays.

A final criterion I want to mention is the issue of access. Jen Harvie notes that often 'gaining access to the development and rehearsal process is simply impractical', and this has been the case at times also for this project (2010: 1). Thus, in addition to choosing directors for their work, I have also chosen directors based on whether I could aquire the necessary levels of access to them. Most importantly, the directors featured in this study all agreed to let me interview them, and it has been possible to carry out interviews either face to face or via Skype or phone. In addition, two of the directors, Arnarsson and Rüping, agreed to let me observe rehearsals, and it has been possible for me to attend their rehearsals in Hannover and Munich. Finally, all directors have directed productions that I have had the opportunity to watch live. This question of access should not be downplayed. There are directors I wanted to study and even contacted that either did not get back to me or found it impossible to fit me into their schedules. I have chosen not to include discussions of productions by directors it has not been possible to interview in order to present a coherent set of data as a basis for a coherent and structured discussion. I mention this issue of access not in any way to undermine the selection of directors in this thesis, but rather to illustrate that access is an important point when attempting, as I do, to study contemporary theatre behind the scenes, and one that has also influenced my research.

1.3 Methods

Ric Knowles argues that '*meaning* [is] produced in the theatre as a negotiation at the intersection of three shifting and mutually constitutive poles', namely 'Performance', 'Conditions of production' and 'Conditions of reception' (2004: 3). These three poles are critical for my exploration of the six directors. As far as possible, I want to combine and negotiate the study of the actual performances on stage with what Knowles calls the 'conditions of production' and the 'conditions of reception'. To achieve this, I have three

main methods or methodological strategies in my exploration of the directors' work: watching and analysing productions, interviewing directors and observing directors in rehearsals. I hope to understand how the six directors I study negotiate canonical plays for today's theatre, how they hope to influence, move or engage a contemporary audience through these plays, and what effects their productions produce in the performance situation. Following Knowles, I hope to create this understanding through studying theatre in a wider sense where not only the 'performance text' – what Knowles refers to as 'the raw theatrical event shared by practitioners and audiences, what is traditionally thought of as the performance "itself"' (2004: 3) – but also the artists' process of creation and conditions under which the audience experience the production are taken into consideration. I will explain further how I have utilised each of my three main research methods below.

1.3.1 Analysis of productions

I have watched productions based on canonical plays by all the directors I have interviewed, and I analyse these productions with a specific focus on how they play with, interrogate and challenge canonicity. Knowles' book is called *Reading the Material Theatre*, and in it he argues for exploring the whole theatrical experience a performance involves, from production to reception. Inspired by Knowles, I attempt to investigate all the three facets of performance he presents above: conditions of production, conditions of reception and the performance itself, and the relations between them. I focus particularly on the way in which the directors make connections between canonical plays and the conditions of the contemporary theatre situation. This means that when I analyse performances I focus not only on the performance itself, but also on what Knowles calls the conditions of reception, on the context in which the performance meets its audience. Thus, I attempt to see not only the choices on stage, but how these choices relate to the contemporary local, political and cultural contexts of the

production. In some instances, I have also been able to inverstigate the third part of Knowles triangle, the conditions of production, by attending and observing rehearsals. I discuss rehearsal observation more in depth below. Through focusing on all three elements of Knowles' triangle, my analyses discuss not only what is expressed on stage, but how the productions resonate in the contemporary of which they are part. My studies of productions of canonical plays reveal how the productions tailor their engagement with canonical plays to contemporary conditions, and how the canon of the past and the contemporary situation influence each other in the theatrical experience.

Particularly in the fourth chapter of the thesis, I introduce a term I have developed to analyse how productions negotiate the status of canonical plays: 'points of expectation'. I will give a further definition of this term in chapter four, and here it suffices to note that points of expectation are moments or elements in or around canonical plays that have become particularly famous, often bringing certain audience expectations with them. In chapter four, I explore how directors exploit and negotiate points of expectation in their productions. I focus on points of expectation related to text, characters and place of performance.

Throughout my thesis Mouffe's concept of 'critical art' forms the basis for my analysis of productions. Through my analyses I always seek to uncover how productions deal with the ideological implications of the canon, and I discuss how performances adhere to or disrupt hegemony, what kinds of collective identities they form, and what kind of public spaces they create. Whether the directors release the critical potential of art as envisaged by Mouffe is the specific topic of chapter six; yet Mouffe's theories cut across the research chapters more broadly.

I have not structured the thesis as a series of case studies or performance analyses, and analysis and discussions of productions take different forms throughout my thesis. Where the interviews give me insight into how the directors think about canonicity, and rehearsal

observation makes it possible to understand how directors work with canonicity, close reading of the directors' productions enables me to explore how they interrogate and challenge canonicity on stage and what the effects of such interrogation and challenging are. My aim for the discussions of the productions is to explore how canonicity is dealt with and what kind of statements about the canon and canonicity the productions make. I focus on the way in which the productions (re)produce, negotiate, interrogate and challenge the canon and its ideologies. My analyses contribute to the main aim of the thesis, namely to deepen scholarly understanding of why the theatre continues to engage with the canon and how theatrical engagements with the canon relate to the contemporary moment.

1.3.2 Interviews

Because my goal is to study theatrical production not only from watching finished productions but also to understand the directors' creative processes and the thoughts underpinning them, I required specific kinds of information which reveal this process. I have chosen to do this through qualitative interviews. In their book on qualitative interviewing, Herbert and Irene Rubin argue that interviews can become '[i]nsider accounts [that] give the reader a glimpse backstage' (1995: 91). In my theatrical context the choice of the metaphor 'backstage' here is appropriate, and the interviews I conducted gave me insight into how the directors think about and work with canonical plays 'backstage'. Rubin and Rubin further argue that '[q]ualitative interviewing is appropriate when the purpose of the research is to unravel complicated relationships and slowly evolving events' (1995: 1). This description fits with the primary aims of this thesis. Creating a theatrical production is indeed a process of 'complicated relationships and slowly evolving events'. This can be said both of specific productions and of a director's career and how their thoughts on theatre and canonical texts develop throughout this career. Because of the insights qualitative interviews give into how

directors think about plays and how they work with them, I find that such interviews are an appropriate research method for me in this project.

The interviews I have conducted shared the same outline and structure. I asked the directors about three main topics:

1. Why they choose to work with canonical playtexts.
2. How they approach and work with such playtexts in preparation and rehearsal.
3. How they experience working with such playtexts in different languages and in different countries and theatrical cultures.[3]

All directors were made familiar with these main topics before the interview took place. The interviews had an open structure that encouraged deeper conversation rather than simple questions and answers. Tim Rapley notes that '[m]uch of the more contemporary literature, irrespective of broader theoretical commitments, argues for an engaged, active or collaborative format of interviewing' (2004: 22). Such an engaged and active format of interviewing was also important for me when I developed and conducted the interviews, as I wanted the directors to be free to talk about what they found important about the topics, rather than to just answer my preconceived questions. The open structure of the interviews resulted in conversations that covered the same topics, but often looked different in the ways, structure and order in which these topics were discussed. The structure allowed me to make sure that

[3] When I began my work on this thesis, I believed that comparing directing strategies across countries was going to be a main topic. As my work progressed, however, this issue has faded more into the background for several reasons. Perhaps the most important of these reasons is that the strategies employed by the directors are diverse, and one cannot necessarily say that my findings suggest that there is a specifically German, Norwegian and English 'style' of directing. This third topic in my interviews, which were all conducted at an early stage of the project, is therefore not reflected as much in the final thesis. Nevertheless, the question did widen the scope of my conversations with the directors, and points were raised that have had an impact on my thought process throughout my project.

all the directors answered the same key questions, while focusing on aspects and issues that were specific for each specific director. All interviews were, with permission of the interviewees, recorded and later transcribed, and I quote from these transcriptions throughout the thesis. The interviews with the Norwegian directors where conducted in Norwegian, and quotations from these interviews are translated by myself. The four other interviews were conducted in English. The directors have been given the quotes from their interview that feature in the thesis and been given the chance to comment on them. The interviews took place on the following dates and locations:

- Alexander Mørk-Eidem: A rehearsal room at The Royal Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm, 28.01.2017
- Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson: The cafeteria at the Schauspielhaus Hannover, 02.02.2017. Due to time constraints this interview was later followed up via email.
- Joe Hill-Gibbins: via Skype, 08.03.2017
- Christopher Rüping: via Skype, 25.03.2017
- Emma Rice: via telephone, 05.07.2017
- Sigrid Strøm Reibo: The café Baker Hansen in Vika, Oslo, 15.08.2017

1.3.3 Rehearsal observation

In addition to the interviews, I have also carried out rehearsal observations. Following Ric Knowles, it has, as mentioned, been important to me to not only explore what kinds of productions contemporary directors create from canonical texts, but also the work processes they use when encountering such texts. Paul Atkinson suggests that to understand the process of theatrical creation 'there is no alternative to the anthropological-cum-sociological process of protracted engagement with the 'field'' (2004: 100). He argues that some level of

understanding can be 'gained through one-off interviews [and] the collection of autobiographical narratives of singers[4] and other protagonists [but the] understandings to be gained from such sources (…) are by no means the same' as those obtained through actually engaging with the field (2004: 100). Following Atkinson, I have attempted to supplement the information gained from the interviews with observations of the directors in rehearsals.

However, more than anything else, rehearsal observation is subject to access and availability as discussed above. I have therefore not been in rehearsals with all the directors I have interviewed, as this would have been impossible to achieve within the timespan and other constraints of this project. However, in two instances, rehearsal observation has been possible to achieve, and these two instances were:

- 30.01-03.02.2017 with Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson in his rehearsals for *Hamlet* at Hannover Schauspielhaus in Hannover. The week I attended was approximately three weeks before opening night, and the week where the production moved from the rehearsal space to the main stage of the theatre.
- 23.10-14.12.2017 with Christopher Rüping in his rehearsals for Brecht's *Drums in the Night* at Münchner Kammerspiele in Munich. I attended the full rehearsal period for the production. This production and my observations are the basis for chapter 5 of the thesis.

Several scholars have noted that the researcher, through prolonged engagement in a rehearsal process, may come to be invested in the work that has been done and the result that has been produced. Paul Allain, for example, discusses this possible problem. He describes how '[i]ndubitably academics will be drawn to write about work they like', and continues by suggesting that '[o]ne risk is that insiders become mouthpieces for the artists' (2016: 494).

[4] Aktinson's focus is mainly on opera, but his insights are transferrable to theatre and other performative art forms where rehearsals are a major way of working.

Similarly, Gay McAuley, who engaged deeply in a rehearsal process at Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney when researching for her book *Not Magic but Work*, comments: 'Writing about rehearsal (…) requires navigation of a fine line between betraying confidences by telling too much and failing to engage with the reality of the practice by telling too little' (2012: 8). Allain sums up these concerns when he asks: 'If the writer is embedded, how do they then emerge to see a piece and a group clearly? They can become too closely connected and involved, resulting in them being unable to be objective' (2016: 491). Such concerns are relevant for my engagement with rehearsal observation. My week with Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson and his company in Hannover can serve as an example here. During the week, I had long and friendly conversations with Arnarsson, with the actors and with the stage managers. When rehearsals ran over one evening and the last bus had left, one of the actors gave me a lift back to town. During this time, I developed a friendly attitude towards Arnarsson and his team, which, to a certain extent, influence the way I view their work, even if I attempt to make my observations as unbiased as possible.

However, the researcher being embedded in the process is not necessarily an insoluble problem. As long as the researcher's biases are acknowledged and analysed as part of the research, the knowledge gained through prolonged and engaged observation of rehearsals can be extremely valuable. Many scholars who have engaged in rehearsal observations make this point. McAuley opens her book by stating: 'In keeping with contemporary ethnographic practice, I make no attempt to disguise my own presence as a narrator in this account' (2012: 2). Following McAuley, I also make no attempt at hiding my own presence and role when writing about the rehearsals I attended. Introducing the contributors in *Making Contemporary Theatre. International Rehearsal Practices*, Jen Harvie comments on the same issue of the researchers' close relation to the artistic process:

> Across the board (…) we have sought insider, experience-based, close engagement with the work. Critics might argue that this approach compromises our authors' objectivity. This is a deliberate critical turn on our part: we are interested here in exploring subjective, engaged critical approaches rather than ones which privilege a supposed – but also problematic – critical objectivity (2010: 5).

I find Harvie's point both convincing and important. While 'critical objectivity' might serve as an ideal, it seems more productive to acknowledge the subjective nature of rehearsal observation, while simultaneously always acknowledging, scrutinising and critiqueing one's own biases and assumptions. I have been particularly inspired by a description of the researcher engaged in rehearsal observation authored by Lou Cope, who presents her essay in *Making Contemporary Theatre* in the following way: 'What follows is an attempt to explore the different approaches, modes and perspectives afforded by my "privileged-insider" position at the outside of the inside of this extraordinary melting pot' (2010: 43). The observer in rehearsals is both inside and outside, privy to insider information while outside the actual creative process. Analysing rehearsals through observation, then, needs to be followed by a constant analysis of the observer's role in the rehearsals and the biases they have towards the work and the people they meet. This is the attitude I have maintained throughout my work with this thesis.

1.4 The structure of the thesis

As I have emphasised above, it has been important to me to deploy a comparative approach throughout this thesis. Rather than focusing specifically on the work of each individual director, my main goal is to explore different ways in which canonicity is approached in their work. I have therefore not structured the thesis into chapters on the individual directors, mainly for two reasons. First, I wanted to make sure that canonicity is the main focus

throughout, and the chapters all have topics that somehow relate to canonicity in the theatre. Second, chapters on the individual directors would make comparisons between the directors more difficult and would, I believe, also cause repetition.

The thesis has six chapters, of which this introduction is the first. Chapter two is the chapter that to the largest extent builds on the interviews I have conducted with the directors. The chapter is concerned with the directors' reasons for working with canonical plays, and what values they see in working with such plays today. The first two parts of the chapter are concerned with how the directors subscribe to a view of canonical plays as works of particularly 'high quality'. I identify how the directors express this view in their interviews, and I also discuss why this view of canonical plays is problematic. However, the directors also give a different reason for working on canonical texts, namely the opportunities for playing with and challenging audience expectation that arise from the plays' canonical status and familiarity. The directors show a willingness to negotiate, question and even challenge the canon in performance. In the third section of the chapter, I discuss how such goals of negotiating and challenging the canon explicitly on stage can be seen in the directors' reasoning, and how they might form the foundation for what Mouffe defines as counter-hegemonic artistic practices.

Having established why the directors work with canonical texts and what they hope to achieve with their productions, chapter three is concerned with *how* the directors work with such plays. In the chapter I use translation theory, and particularly translation scholar Lawrence Venuti's concepts of 'domestication' and 'foreignization', to discuss how the directors translate the written text of canonical plays into contemporary theatrical performances. The chapter presents three main strategies for translating text to performance that are present in the work of the directors. The first strategy is concerned with translating the text – both its language and its reference points – to equivalents that are supposedly more

relatable in the contemporary setting, and I discuss how such an endeavour might be problematic. In the second strategy the directors, rather than finding contemporary equivalents, point out the differences between the text of the past and the contemporary situation and make these differences explicitly part of the staging. The third strategy involves the director completely reworking the text and using it more as a material for inspiration in a postmodern sense than as a 'blueprint' for performance. In this chapter, I argue that strategies whereby directors point out and challenge problematic features of canonical plays, rather than attempt to translate such features for contemporary sensibilities, form the basis for critically engaging with the canon and for creating theatrical productions that also encourage critical reflection on hegemonic structures in contemporary society.

Chapter four discusses how the directors deal with canonicity in their productions. I introduce the term 'points of expectation' to analyse how the directors handle points in the play or the theatrical situation that, for different reasons, have acquired a particular status in relation to audience expectation. I then discuss how the directors deal with such points in relation to three different theatrical elements: playtexts, characters and the location of performance. The chapter analyses how the directors' goals (presented in chapter two) and their working strategies (presented in chapter three) are realised in actual performances on stage. I argue that engaging directly with canonicity is a way for the directors to speak directly to their contemporary audience in the specific theatrical situation. The analyses provided in the chapter also form the basis for the more theoretical discussions on the political impact of theatre's engagement with the canon, which I provide in chapter six.

Chapter five is an extension of chapter four, as I discuss many of the same themes, but here the focus is on one specific production, namely Brecht's *Drums in the Night* directed by Christopher Rüping at the Münchner Kammerspiele in 2017. This production is a particularly significant case study for me because it engaged with the origins of the text, its history and

status and the figure of Brecht in very explicit ways. I analyse the production in depth with a particular focus on its relation to Brecht and Brechtian theories of theatre, and I argue that the interplay between the play, its staging history and perceptions of the figure of Brecht was the main strategy Rüping used to successfully create meaning in the contemporary theatrical situation and engage with the contemporary audience. In my analysis, I also identify a certain self-reflexive attitude in the production where it not only (re)produced the play, but also made an exploration within its own staging of what it means to (re)produce the play today. The self-reflexive attitude I identify in Rüping's work becomes an important starting point for my theoretical discussions in chapter six.

In chapter six, I widen my focus from looking at specific productions to discuss more far-reaching cultural and political implications of the kind of theatre I am studying. Specifically, I use Mouffe's theories of agonism and critical art to investigate what kind of political implications engaging with the canon and canonicity on stage can have. The chapter discusses how theatre can contribute to disrupting hegemony, form new collective identities and create agonistic public spaces. I argue that theatre, and particularly directors' theatre engaged with canonical texts, has a potential for becoming 'critical art' in Mouffe's sense and I discuss to what extent productions by the directors I discuss realise this potential. I argue that instances where these directors come closest to realising the critical potential of their work with canonical texts is when the ideological implications of the canon are explicitly played out, negotiated and challenged on stage in a self-reflexive fashion.

Chapter 2: Why do directors engage with the canon?

As mentioned in the introduction, the first research question that this thesis attempts to answer is why theatre directors still engage with the canon. In the introduction, I discussed how the canon with its values and ideologies has been critiqued as a problematic institution that confirms hegemonic power structures and excludes minority and counter-hegemonic voices. I also pointed out how directors and producers contribute to creating and confirming the canon through the choices they make about which texts to produce. Taking these problematic features of the canon and the theatre's engagement with it into account, it becomes important to ask why contemporary theatre directors work with canonical texts at all and what they hope to achieve with productions of such texts. In this chapter, I explore these questions through the answers given by the six directors when I interviewed them and asked them to elaborate on their reasons for working with and producing canonical texts. Thus, before I, in later chapters, discuss the methods the directors use for working with canonical texts in the contemporary and the results they achieve in their performances, this chapter aims to explore and analyse the goals the directors have for their productions of canonical plays.

As I have discussed in the introduction, traditional theories of canon formation, such as those formulated by T. S. Eliot and Harold Bloom, define canonical works in terms of 'quality'. In such traditional views, the canon is seen as a list of works that are of particularly 'high quality'. As I will show in this chapter, the perceived 'quality' of canonical texts is also a main reason the six directors I study give for their engagement with canonical texts. In different ways, they all argue that canonical texts are of particularly 'high quality', and that this 'quality' is an important reason for continuing to engage with such texts. Thus, they subscribe to an old fashioned, 'quality'-based view of the canon to a certain extent. However, as I have demonstrated in the introduction, seeing the canon as formed solely through 'quality' is problematic because of the power structures it implies, and such a view has been

the object of much criticism. In the first part of this chapter, I demonstrate how the directors in different ways present 'quality' as a main reason for working with canonical texts. After having presented how the directors relate to 'quality', I discuss how their acceptance of the canon as of particularly 'high quality' is potentially problematic for the theatre they create. However, the directors also give a different reason for working with canonical plays; they argue that the canonical status and fame of such plays create possibilities for playing with and challenging audience expectations and dominant culture. As will become evident, several of the directors argue that it is possible through theatrical production not only to present but also to challenge and critique the ideology of the canon, and, through such challenging and critiquing, also to scrutinise contemporary culture and society. I will demonstrate how such practices of challenging and critiquing are an important goal for several of the directors, and I will discuss whether a strategy of challenging the canon and its values can form a foundation for practices that begin to answer Mouffe's requests for counter-hegemonic artistic interventions.

2.1 Quality

As I have discussed in the introduction, a perceived 'quality' has traditionally been the most important criterion for defining a text as canonical. 'Quality' is also a frequently mentioned reason the directors give for working with canonical texts. Throughout the interviews, the directors mention the 'exceptional quality' of canonical plays, and they refer to a view where canonical plays that are still performed have been 'selected' through time because they are 'good'. Such references to inherent quality can of course be problematic in several ways, and below I will look at the connection between canonical texts and 'quality' in a critical light. First, however, I will focus simply on how the directors argue for the 'quality' of canonical plays by referring to examples from the interviews I made with them. In his interview,

Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson comments on the relation between the canon and 'quality' in the following way:

> [Older plays] have mostly survived because they are very good. (…) Newer texts have not gone through the selection of time (…) So it becomes more difficult to hit the jackpot with a contemporary play (…) [With the canon, t]ime has filtered away, so what's left behind are excellent texts (2017).

Alexander Mørk-Eidem claims something similar when he explains:

> These plays have survived because they are really good. They work more or less in any given case. Even if you have a really bad idea or director or something like that, there's always something that works (2017).

Whilst Arnarsson's and Mørk-Eidem's comments are more explicit in their meaning, similar sentiments can be found in the interviews with the other directors as well. The directors argue that a reason for them to produce canonical texts is that such texts are of exceptionally "high quality". As will be evident below, two different ways of defining the relationship between canonical texts and 'quality' are evident in the interviews: The first sees 'quality' as an intrinsic characteristic of canonical plays, while the other sees the 'quality' of canonical plays expressed in the ways the plays are 'relevant' for contemporary situations and/or for the directors themselves.

In several instances, the directors seem to suggest that 'quality' is an intrinsic characteristic of the canon. This intrinsic relation between 'quality' and the canon can be further explored through an example from my interview with Mørk-Eidem. In the interview, I discussed with Mørk-Eidem how he came to direct *Peer Gynt* at the National Theatre in Oslo. Mørk-Eidem explained that Hanne Tømta, the artistic director, asked him to direct *Peer Gynt*, and described his own reactions to this question as follows:

> I said 'no' at once, completely by instinct. Because I have never actually liked *Peer Gynt*. Or I have never understood how to do it. It's strange to say that I don't like it, because it is good of course (2017).

This statement seems to show that even if Mørk-Eidem's gut reaction towards a play is that he does not like it or it is not right for him, he still might have great respect for the play because of its canonical status. It is striking how Mørk-Eidem corrects himself immediately when he claims that he does not like *Peer Gynt*, finding it strange to claim such a view of perhaps the most canonical of all Norwegian plays. In Mørk-Eidem's case his respect for the play was enough for him to find a way to direct the play and finally agree to Tømta's request. Even when he himself did not at once find a connection with Ibsen's play, Mørk-Eidem was prepared to produce it because he found that the play's canonical status confirmed its inherent 'quality'.

A similar sentiment can be seen in the interview conducted with Joe Hill-Gibbins, who gave the following account of his views on canonical plays:

> This might sound like a very predictable or conservative viewpoint, but I think the vast majority of plays which are at the centre of the canon as we might think about it in our kind of Western, European world, [are of] exceptionally high quality. (…) [T]he more I've directed, the more I've ended up gravitating towards classic plays because the quality of the writing and the complexity of the writing is so exceptional that I get very excited about them. So it may sound like a very conservative viewpoint – maybe it is a very conservative viewpoint, I don't know – but when you say 'canonical plays' I understand exactly what you mean, and [for] me that means good plays (2017).

As we see, Hill-Gibbins acknowledges that by accepting a connection between 'quality' and canonicity, he also subscribes to perceived ideas about conservative values. However, these concerns are not enough for him to question his choices profoundly because of the

'exceptionally high quality' of the plays. He still finds that 'canonical plays' are, almost by necessity, 'good plays'. Mørk-Eidem and Hill-Gibbins, then, both suggest that canonical plays are intrinsically of 'high quality', and even while to a certain extent acknowledging that there might be problematic sides to such an intrinsic correlation between 'quality' and canonicity, they still view the 'quality' of canonical plays as an important reason for producing such plays.

Another point regarding 'quality' as intrinsic to canonical plays came up at several points through the interviews, namely the idea that canonical plays are inherently 'good' because they are 'universal' – they present, according to several of the directors, themes that are always important for human beings. In the quote that introduced this section on 'quality', for example, Mørk-Eidem claims that canonical texts 'work more or less in any given case' (2017). Even if the director or production is not 'good', canonical plays resonate with universal themes that make them work in almost any context. Sigrid Strøm Reibo makes a similar point about the 'universal quality' of canonical plays:

> [Canonical plays] discuss what it means to be human, and they lift up questions that are relevant for human beings, whenever they live: What is the meaning of life? What is love? What is truth? (…) Plays that are very time-specific in relation to politics etc. can [be harder to understand in subsequent times]. If they don't contain some large themes, they won't survive, I believe (2017).

According to her viewpoint, the quality of canonical plays is connected to how these plays present themes that are 'profoundly human'. Canonical plays supposedly transcend time and place and speak to an inner-human kernel that is always present in the lives of human beings. Thus, 'quality' is seen as an inherent characteristic of canonical plays because the plays have proved their 'universality' through speaking to cultures and societies across time. As I will

show below, claiming that canonical plays are 'universal' is at least as problematic as claiming that they are inherently of 'high quality'.

The arguments about 'universalism' above lead us to the other main connection the directors make between 'quality' and canonicity, namely through pointing out how canonical plays resonate with contemporary issues and thus become 'relevant'. As in the arguments about 'universalism', it is seen as a sign of 'quality' that canonical texts can acquire relevance in new settings. Jan Gorak claims that an important feature of canonical texts is that they become 'the receptacle for all kinds of interpretations' (2014: 63). A similar sentiment can be seen among several of the six directors, who argue that a sign of quality in canonical plays is that they continue to acquire relevance in ever-new settings. The directors argue that relevance can be found both on a cultural level – the plays resonate with issues that are discussed also in the contemporary – and a personal level – the plays resonate with the personal interests of the director. Arguments about a relation between 'quality' and 'relevance' on a cultural level can, for example, be seen in some reflections Arnarsson made on the Shakespeare canon:

> Even within the Shakespeare canon, there are plays we very rarely do today. [An example is] *Richard II*, which actually would fit very well into today's political climate. But it's still performed very [rarely]. And it's because dramatically it's not as strong (…) But, you know, *Hamlet* – which contains both political, family-related and existential topics – is a play that will have its own context in each time, in each staging, each city (2017).

This statement clearly shows how Arnarsson sees a connection between a play's 'quality' and its 'relevance', in the sense of how its themes fit with contemporary sensibilities and situations. According to this view, even if *Richard II* might hold themes and pose questions that can be seen as fitting in today's political climate, it is not performed because it is, as

Arnarsson phrases it, 'dramatically not as strong'. *Hamlet* on the other hand is seen as dramatically strong, and through its aesthetic qualities, its themes – politics, family and existential questions – becomes 'relevant' in new contexts. Thus, it seems that for Arnarsson and those who agree with him, 'quality' and 'relevance' go hand in hand. A play can become 'better' by being 'relevant' and more relevant by being 'good', and this connection between 'quality' and 'relevance' is important in choosing to work with canonical texts.

A different way of looking at the connection between 'quality' and 'relevance' can be seen in the points Emma Rice made in my interview with her. Rice also emphasises a feeling of 'relevance' as important when she chooses to work on canonical texts, but for her the 'relevance' is not related to contemporary times, culture or society, but to her own personal experiences and interests. When describing how she chooses a play to produce, she focuses almost solely on the impact the story has on herself:

> I always listened to my instincts, so I try to tell stories that I want to tell at a certain time in my life. And when I say 'want', I don't mean like picking clothes from a shelf, I mean the stories that visit me at night, or that I dream about, or [that I] suddenly am remembering (2017).

As can be seen here, Rice also highlights 'relevance' as a main reason for working with a canonical text, but to her, 'relevance' is based on the ways in which the text resonates with herself and her personal interests. Technically, Rice's description could fit not only canonical texts, but any story that makes a powerful impression on her. Nevertheless, Rice has throughout her career mainly staged texts and plays that are already famous, such as fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen, plays by Shakespeare, an adaptation of the novel *Rebecca* by Daphne de Maurier, and most recently Offenbach's operetta *Orpheus in the Underworld*. Thus, the stories that visit Rice at night and seem most 'relevant' to her are the famous stories of the canon. Rice insists on a clear connection between these stories and herself. Here

follows, for example, her reasons for choosing to produce *Twelfth Night* at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre:

> *Twelfth Night* is all about grief. And I knew that I wanted to do that in my middle age. And I wrote in the program about my first bereavement, which is my friend who died of leukaemia when we were 11. And I've never talked about it. I mean, it feels very interesting to me that it took *Twelfth Night* to allow me to talk about it (2017).

This quote is telling, revealing as it does how a director can see 'quality' in a canonical play in the way they experience the text as connecting with themselves. For Rice, *Twelfth Night* is not (only) 'good' in and of itself, but it proves its qualities by being a vehicle for her to talk about an important experience in her own life, her 'first bereavement'. 'Quality' is seen in how the text is 'relevant' for the director and resonates with her life and experiences. Arnarsson's and Rice's arguments, then, serve as examples for how the directors find that it is a sign of 'quality' that a text becomes 'relevant', either through resonating with issues the directors see in contemporary culture and society, or through resonating with particular issues or interests that are important to the directors themselves.

To sum up, the six directors continuously subscribe to a view of canonical texts as texts of exceptionally 'high quality', and they argue that this 'quality' is an important reason for engaging with such texts in their productions. The directors see 'high quality' as an inherent characteristic of canonical texts, secured by the fact that these texts have survived over time or that can be seen in the texts' universality that seemingly makes them 'accessible' to human beings in all cultures and contexts. They also see 'high quality' in the ways the texts acquire 'relevance', either in relation to contemporary issues or in relation to the personal interests of the director. In any case, this section demonstrates that the directors subscribe to a view of the canon as of particularly 'high quality'. In the next section, I critique this view from several points of view, and I argue that subscribing to a view of the canon as inherently

of ‘high quality’ can potentially undermine the possible political impact of the directors’ productions.

2.2 Critiquing ‘quality’ as reason

The way in which the directors create a relation between canonical status and quality needs to be problematised from several points of view, and I will outline some different criticisms here. A first set of critical views is tied to how the directors accept that canonical survival over time is by definition a sign of ‘quality’. As I discussed in the introduction, while the idea of an intrinsic correlation between quality and survival over time has been part of the ideas of canon formation for years, this view has been severely criticised in more recent times. In the section on canon in the introduction, I demonstrated how influential scholars like Eliot and Bloom see ‘quality’, defined through concepts of ‘maturity’ and ‘strangeness’ respectively, as the main defining criteria of canonical works. Bloom actually claims rather bluntly that ‘[a]ll strong literary originality becomes canonical’, and continues to argue: ‘One breaks into the canon only by aesthetic strength’ (1994: 25, 29). As we see, for Bloom there is a corresponding relation here: to become part of the canon, a text has to be “good” – or ‘aesthetically strong’ – and when a text has such ‘aesthetic strength’, it will become part of the canon. However, in the introduction, I also showed how critics have suggested that the canon limits cultural expression by only allowing for inclusion works that conform to the hegemonic interests and values in the culture in question, or, as Kolbas puts it, ‘the canon has been dominated by “dead, white European males”’ (2001: 1). In Kolbas’ description, works are canonical not because of inherent ‘quality’, but because they suit the views of particular groups of people with power. As such, the canon, rather than being a collection of particularly ‘good’ works, is an expression of hegemony and dominant ideology, or, using Althusser’s concepts, part of the Ideological State Apparatuses.

Taking this into consideration, it becomes clear that the 'quality' the directors find in canonical plays proves a relation between dominant ideology and individual taste. Or rather, the directors' taste is governed by ideology and, to use a term defined by Pierre Bourdieu, by their 'cultural capital'. In his studies, Bourdieu establishes 'the very close relationship linking cultural practices (or the corresponding opinions) to educational capital (measured by qualifications) and, secondarily, to social origin' (2010: 5). According to Bourdieu, a person's cultural practices and opinions (including their taste and perception of quality) is less linked to characteristics in the work or object in question and more to that person's background. A sense of quality, in Bourdieu's view, is not something you have, it's something you learn:

> [I]t becomes possible to establish whether these dispositions and competences [related to enjoying works of art] are gifts of nature as the charismatic ideology of the relation to the work of art would have it, or products of learning, and to bring to light the hidden conditions of the miracle of the unequal class distribution of the capacity for inspired encounters with works of art and high culture in general (2010: 21).

According to Bourdieu, then, taste or the disposition for enjoying particular kinds of works of art is not universal, and cannot be described as 'gifts of nature'. Instead, he argues, taste is acquired through life conditions, upbringing and learning. Thus, taste is also an expression of class, as members of certain layers of society have different access to educational institutions and different experiences than members of other layers of society. In his work, Bourdieu defines different zones of taste that 'roughly correspond to educational levels and social classes' (2010: 8). This is an important point for understanding the relation between 'quality' and the canon. Taking Bourdieu's argument into account, 'quality' is not an inherent characteristic of canonical works, as the directors seem to suggest, but rather, finding quality in the canon is a symptom of a person's cultural capital. People see 'quality' in the canon because canonical texts resonate with their taste and what they have learned and experienced.

Furthermore, Bourdieu also suggests that taste norms reinforce themselves: 'Any legitimate work tends in fact to impose the norms of its own perception and tacitly defines as the only legitimate mode of perception the one which brings into play a certain disposition and a certain competence' (2010: 20). According to Bourdieu, artworks, like canonical texts, legitimise and perpetuate the taste norms that made them canonical in the first place. The 'quality' that the directors find in canonical texts is therefore a 'quality' that they have learned to appreciate, that they continue to appreciate through continued engagement with such texts and that they also impose on others by suggesting that these particular texts, in spite of being for example 'male, white and European', are inherently of 'high quality'.

The directors' emphasis on the 'quality' of canonical plays can thus be seen in relation to Bourdieu's theories. They have all had access to educational institutions that to some extent emphasise canonical texts, and they are members of a theatrical environment and tradition where such texts are important ingredients. When they claim that canonical texts are 'good', they do so from their own perspective based on their own acquired taste. The connection between taste and cultural capital highlights how we cannot see the relation between canonicity and 'quality' as straightforward, but rather as always tied to the cultural conditions and circumstances. In the case of directors' theatre, this connection means that what is shown to the audience is a reflection of the cultural capital of the directors and producers; influencing as it does which plays they choose to direct or produce. Thus, theatrical production of canonical plays becomes a feedback loop of its own, as artists and experienced audiences learn to enjoy canonical plays, and therefore more canonical plays are chosen for production. The problem with this mechanism of continual reproduction of the canon is of course that when the canonical texts are reproduced, so are the values and ideologies found within them, values and ideologies which in Kolbas' argument are limited to male, white and European perspectives, and which, if we draw on the theories of Althusser, are the values and

ideologies of 'the ruling class'. In short, by subscribing to an inherent 'quality' of the canon, the directors reproduce the hegemonic values and ideologies of culture and society. This point is significant for my discussion of the directors' works in light of Chantal Mouffe's theories. As I discussed in the introduction, Mouffe sees the critical potential of art in its ability to challenge hegemonic structures. However, the directors seem to subscribe to a view of the canon as of particularly 'high quality', and therefore seem to uncritically subscribe to the values and ideologies of the canon. Therefore, it seems difficult for their productions to challenge hegemonic structures and ideologies in any significant way, both in the canon and in society, and it seems questionable whether such productions can achieve Mouffe's ideals for critical art. This is an issue I will return to in depth in chapter six.

I have shown that the directors' acceptance of canonical texts as inherently of 'high quality' is problematic because it reproduces old, conservative and hegemonic taste norms, ideologies and values. However, this is not the only criticism that can be made of the connections the directors make between the canon and 'quality', and below I will scrutinise the claims the directors make both about the canon's supposed 'universal' nature and about its supposed 'relevance'. The question of a canonical text being 'universal' – of containing certain themes that are always important – is a highly contested one in several fields. As Kolbas puts it:

> the Western canon (…) once thought of as timeless and universal, is now being undermined by the combined forces of feminism, multiculturalism, popular culture, and relativistic theories that have occupied schools and universities since the 1960s (2001: 1).

All of these different theories and directions of thought have contributed to pointing out how the Western canon usually serves to exclude points of view that are not, for example, white, male or heterosexual, and thereby also emphasise how the Western canon in no way is

universal. One can see, for example, how such contributions have shifted the views on Shakespeare's plays, which traditionally have been seen as perhaps the clearest example of 'universal' literature. In a conservative view, Harold Bloom argues that '[t]here is a substance in Shakespeare's work that prevails and that has proved multicultural, so universally apprehended in all languages as to have established a pragmatic multiculturalism around the globe' (1994: 62). Shakespeare's plays are, in this reading, seen not only to speak to people all over the world but to actually promote multiculturalism. However, this argument fails to take into consideration how views that differ from the white, Western, male norms are underrepresented in the plays. Bridget Escolme notes how suggesting that 'Shakespeare has something 'universal' or 'timeless' to say to audiences of any period [is] a problematic kind of essentialism' (2012: 132). Ayanna Thompson has written specifically about Shakespeare and race, and she argues: 'Although Shakespeare is often described as having created "universal" plays with "timeless" themes, the universality and timelessness of the Bard's works are often tested when actors of color are involved' (2006: 2). According to Thompson, the 'universal quality' of Shakespeare's plays has usually not included other ethnicities than white. Taking Thompson's and similar arguments into consideration, it is always important to question any simple alignment between canonical plays and 'universalism'. Like any other expression, canonical plays favour certain views and obscure others, they reinforce certain power structures and weaken others.

Another point regarding 'universalism' needs to be mentioned as well. To argue that a canonical play always favours certain views and obscures others does not of course mean that a play firmly planted in a specific situation or event cannot be meaningful in other times and other contexts, but detecting or creating such meaning might involve changes and interventions. In the introduction, I quoted Raymond Williams, who argues that plays of the past are fashioned for the context they originated in and that such plays are not actually

available as a basis for new work today. Williams, however, does not argue that plays of the past cannot be produced in contemporary culture, but that such reproduction always involves substantially changing the play and how it works, or as Williams puts it: 'In practice, always, an apparent use of some older dramatic method is a substantial change of it, in a new context' (1991: 166). Here, Williams argues specifically about dramatic methods and conventions, but the same can be argued about plays' content and themes. A play is always written in and for a specific cultural context, and using it outside this context involve some sort of change and intervention. Such changes and interventions in contemporary directors' theatre are one of the main topics of this thesis, and in later chapters I will discuss specific examples of how the directors I study intervene in and repurpose plays from the past for the contemporary theatrical situation. Here, I will briefly illustrate this by referring to Bertolt Brecht's play *Drums in the Night*, which will be explored in more depth in chapter five. Brecht wrote this play in the very specific situation of the Spartacist uprising, the attempted communist revolution in Berlin in 1919, and the play deals specifically with this event. Nevertheless, Christopher Rüping used the play to create meaning for a contemporary audience in his production in the Münchner Kammerspiele in Munich in 2017. For example, he drew connections between the political situation explored in the play, the Spartacist uprising in Germany in 1919, and contemporary politics through asking questions about the possibility and usefulness of a similar uprising against today's political systems. He also made connections between the first ever performance of the play (which incidentally also took place at the Münchner Kammerspiele) and his contemporary production. Rüping's version of *Drums in the Night* worked, at least seemingly, in very different ways than those suggested by Brecht's play – the production refashioned the play for the contemporary context. From this discussion, we see that canonical plays are not universal in themselves, but that they of course can be used again in new contexts and thus spark the creation of new meanings. In the case of

Drums in the Night, it was exactly the specific political situation portrayed in the play that sparked Rüping's contemporary take on it, which I will discuss further in chapter five.

A final point in this critique of the directors' acceptance of canonical plays as of particularly 'high quality' is that the concept of 'relevance' is at least as problematic as the concept of being 'universal'. 'Relevance' is, like 'quality' and 'universality' not a neutral concept, and the perceived 'relevance' of a canonical text is also an expression of ideology. Once again, the Shakespeare canon can serve as example here. Robert Shaughnessy has written extensively on the position of Shakespeare's history plays in England after the Second World War, particularly as presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company. He notes that 'Shakespeare was, in the hands of [Sir Peter] Hall and his associates [at the early RSC], to become *relevant*' (1994: 12). Shaughnessy reports from a discussion between former artistic directors of the RSC in 1992:

> Both directors [Sir Peter Hall and Adrian Noble] voiced the belief that the histories have (or can be made to have) a recurrent topicality that is perhaps unique among Shakespeare's plays. Moreover, they thought that a primary task of any modern theatre company committed to the production of Shakespeare is (or should be) to exploit this potential as far as it can (1994: 1).

According to the directors at the RSC in the 1990s then, Shakespeare's history plays were particularly 'relevant' for the Royal Shakespeare Company, a state funded theatre company, and its British audiences. Yet, the plays do not have British history as their topic, but English history. Scottish, Welsh and Irish voices are underrepresented in the plays and even presented as enemies or in a mocking fashion. Further, Shakespeare's history is firmly white and male oriented, and both female and minority voices are underplayed and excluded. According to the statistics found at PlayShakespeare.com, Shakespeare's ten plays on English history have an average of 56 parts per play, but out of these only an average of four per play are speaking

female roles and across the ten plays only eight female roles have more than 100 lines of text (Severdia, 2019). No parts in the history plays are explicitly of a different ethnicity than white. Thus, the plays do not reflect the demographics of either historical or contemporary Britain, and the claim that these plays are particularly relevant for a contemporary British audience is therefore highly problematic. The plays are clearly not relevant as a reflection of the diversity of contemporary Britain, but serve rather to reinforce stereotypical views of the country as homogenous and mainly white. When the directors at the RSC claimed that the history plays were particularly well suited for contemporary British audiences, they reproduced old stories about what Britain as a country is. Claiming relevance in this way, then, leads to the reproduction of status quo, stereotypes and hegemonic structures, rather than to an exploration of the diversity that actually exists today. Jan Gorak claims that an 'indispensable requirement of canonicity [is] the ability to be applied in contexts foreign to the circumstances that originally produced it' (2014: 12). However, when one makes claims about a text's relevance in foreign circumstances, it is important to acknowledge the ideological standpoint from which these claims are made and what voices might be excluded from the claim. Thus, it is not possible to make a simple connection between 'relevance' and 'quality'.

This criticism of the notion 'relevance' is also applicable to the way in which Emma Rice relates to canonical texts above. As mentioned, Rice sees 'quality' in a text in how that text resonates with her personal interests and experiences. She claims that the stories she chooses to produce are the stories that 'visit her at night' and let her express important aspects of her own life, like her 'first bereavement'. Rice chooses stories that speak directly to her, and she trusts that this will make her able to make that story speak directly to her audience as well. However, as I have discussed above, which stories Rice sees as relevant to herself is of course coloured by her own position, her ideological standpoints and her cultural capital.

These stories might not speak strongly to other people, or they might speak to other people in completely different ways. This is not necessarily a problem in and of itself, but it is problematic that Rice connects 'quality' so clearly to her own sensibilities, because this shows a lack of reflection on what kinds of ideologies and values the texts reflect and what it means to reproduce them to diverse audiences in a contemporary situation. As I have mentioned in the introduction and in this chapter, I do not mean to argue that canonical texts of the past cannot acquire meaning in the contemporary through theatrical production. I simply point out that it is problematic to use 'relevance' as proof for 'high quality' because such a connection always reflects the taste and values of the person making the claim.

In this section, I have showed how the directors in different ways make connections between the canon and 'quality', and I have showed how uncritically viewing the canon as particularly 'good' is problematic in several different ways. The different critiques I have presented all circle around how quality never can be seen as an objective entity, but always is coloured by ideology. Thus, the perceived 'quality' of the canon is always an expression of hegemony – the canon is 'good' in a way that concurs with and supports the dominant ideologies and hegemonic structures in a given society and culture. So far then, it does not seem like the directors' engagement with the canon can form the basis for the counter-hegemonic artistic practices that Mouffe envisages. As I discussed in the introduction, Mouffe argues that critical art in the agonistic approach makes 'visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate, [and gives] a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony' (2013: 93). The canon, however, can be seen exactly as an expression of the dominant voices in the existing hegemony, and, as I have showed, the connections the directors make between the canon and 'quality' seem to concur with hegemonic structures. The directors accept the 'high quality' of the canon and acknowledge only to a limited extent which ideologies and values the canon favours and which voices the

canon silences and excludes. So far then, it seems that the directors' relationship to the canon is not a promising point of departure for counter-hegemonic artistic practices. However, in the interviews, the directors do not only state 'quality' as a reason for working with canonical texts. They all mention a different reason, that might to a certain extent create more possibilities for critiquing the canon and other hegemonic structures. This reason is the status and fame of canonical plays and the opportunities this status gives for playing with and challenging audience expectation.

2.3 Status

In addition to 'quality', the second main reason the directors mentioned for choosing to work with canonical plays is the status and fame of such plays and the opportunities this gives for playing with cultural values and audience expectation. This reason is perhaps less obvious than the 'quality' argument, and it is therefore striking that it is more or less present in all the six interviews. The directors argue that when directing canonical plays, they not only choose a 'good' play to work with, but they can also utilise that play's position within the cultural context in their staging. On a basic level, this can be as much about practicality as about art. Christopher Rüping explains that, in his experience, 'canonical plays attract a much wider audience than contemporary plays' (2017). Not only does this mean better figures for the box office, but it also allows a director to reach more people with his or her art. As Rüping points out:

> If I say something about, (…) let's say, 'terrorism' with *Hamlet*,[5] most likely there will be much more people going to the show, than if I say it with a contemporary play written by me who nobody knows as an author (2017).

[5] As indeed he did in his 2017 production at the Münchner Kammerspiele.

According to Rüping, canonical plays attract wider audiences and allow him to also reach more people with his work. In this way, the cultural status of a canonical play enhances both the sales figures and the directors' possible impact at a practical level.

However, the cultural status of canonical plays can also open up more *artistic* possibilities. Joe Hill-Gibbins argues that because such plays are performed regularly, they provide more possibilities for directors to use their own imagination and reinvent the play, and he opposes this to productions of completely new plays, which need to stay closer to the written text because there are no or few other theatrical versions of the play available. Hill-Gibbins ties this argument specifically to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which he had directed just prior to our interview:

> I don't know this for sure, but I would presume it's the most produced Shakespeare-play [in the UK], and Shakespeare is done a lot already in the UK, so it's done loads of times. So firstly, [there is] an expectation or a requirement to present it in a way which is not necessarily conventional or is a bit different. You know, immediately it affords a certain license to you as a director (2017).

In Hill-Gibbins' description, the fact that the play is canonical means that the audience wants the director to present a new interpretation. This view certainly runs counter to more old-fashioned views from other periods of the history of the theatre. Erika Fischer-Lichte identifies the exact opposite view of the relationship between text and performance as an important trend in Western theatre up until the 19th century. She argues:

> Theatre performance was predominantly defined by its capacity to convey or mediate dramatic texts, i.e. literary works of art, and the status of 'a work of art' was only conferred on a theatrical performance if it fulfilled this function (2001: 277).

Fischer-Lichte describes a type of theatre where theatrical performance is seen as an extension of, and as totally dependent on, literature. While quite old fashioned, such

sentiments still exist in certain types of theatre and in certain views on theatre also today, for example in attempts towards recreating Shakespearean staging conditions at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. However, Hill-Gibbins describes a very different view where the literary dramatic text, through being well known and part of the canon, actually provides *more* theatrical possibilities for freedom and experimentation for the director than a contemporary text does. It is assumed that famous canonical texts have been available to audience members in several forms (both 'the original' and other adaptations) before the current production, and therefore more intertextual play is possible than is the case with a more contemporary text. In addition, with a contemporary text, which perhaps has not been performed much (or at all) before, a director might feel a certain loyalty towards the playwright to present the play through a more faithful reproduction. With a canonical playwright like Shakespeare, on the other hand, who many theatre audiences are familiar with, there is no need for such loyalty, and this gives greater theatrical freedom for the director.

The particular possibilities for playfulness and creative freedom that Hill-Gibbins finds in canonical texts are even clearer in how the continental directors I have interviewed speak about their engagement with canonical texts. As we shall see, for them, the canonical texts not only inspire experimentation, but the status of the canonical text in the cultural context of the production itself becomes a point of departure for creating meaning for and with the audience. Adaptation scholar Julie Sanders notes how adaptations of famous texts always 'provide their own intertexts, so that adaptations perform in dialogue with other adaptations as well as their informing source', and she notes that such adaptations work 'in terms of complex processes of filtration, and in terms of intertextual webs or signifying fields' (2006: 24). Taking Sanders' points into consideration, in productions of well-known canonical texts, it is possible for the director to work with the 'intertextual webs' and actually

use the ‘complex processes of filtration’ explicitly as part of the aesthetics and the creation of meaning in the theatrical production.

The kind of intertextual thinking suggested by Sanders is also evident in how some of the directors I have interviewed reflect on canonicity. Christopher Rüping explains: ‘All of those canonical plays are part of our collective cultural subconscious’, and this opens up possibilities for questioning and challenging the audience’s views (2017). Arnarsson suggests something similar:

> I’m interested in social contexts within the texts, which means: If you stage a Shakespeare play, not only is it a very good text, but it also has a staging history, and I can use the staging history as another level of reflection on the play (2017).

Mørk-Eidem is even more elaborate when he describes this feature:

> When you play ball with an old text or produce a play that has been produced before, at least when it is among the most well-known, one can assume that someone has seen it before. (…) Then the audience will have expectations. They know; they have read. And you can either break or follow those expectations, and then these interesting frictions occur and a dialogue with the past or the work, which you don’t get with a new text. (…) I don’t know much about wine, but with a Beaujolais, the wine of the year is good but it’s thin and has no depth. The depth comes with age (2017).

These directors are interested in canonical plays not only because of the plays themselves and their perceived ‘quality’, but because of the role these plays already have within a cultural context and the opportunities this role offers to create an impact on an audience. Mørk-Eidem identifies a depth in canonical plays that consists not of the content of the plays themselves, but in the ‘lives’ the plays have had through their staging history and the role they have played in different historical and cultural contexts. Christopher Rüping sums these opportunities up in the following way:

> *Hamlet* and all the canonical plays, they are already part of our cultural identity. (…) And I like to question those parts of our cultural identity. (…) And that's why I like to adapt those canonical texts: because they are already part of our cultural identity and then I like to ask why, what that says about us (2017).

Because the directors see canonical plays as already part of the audience's cultural consciousness, such plays also provide them with opportunities for interrogating and challenging this cultural consciousness. As these arguments show, these directors work with canonical texts not only because of the texts themselves, but because of the status canonical texts have acquired in Western culture. The fact that such canonical texts have become part of 'cultural identity' is meaningful in itself, because they can be used, as Rüping says, to question this identity. The directors seem to suggest that canonical plays can be used in the theatre to ask questions about society and culture not only through a presentation of a content in a specific form, but through questioning and challenging our culture's relationship to the canon and to particular canonical texts. As such, the directors' goals seem to be in line with Whitaker Long's concept of 'arguing performance', which I discussed in the introduction. The directors not only create productions of plays, but productions that argue with and against the plays they are based on. The texts' cultural status is possibly as important as their actual content or story in the work of these directors. This issue is central to my discussions in later chapters because the directors seem to suggest that pointing to a play's cultural status might be the starting point for questioning the theatre's relationship with the canon. If a production not only presents a canonical play but interrogates and challenges it, it can perhaps lead to some sort of counter-hegemonic artistic practice in the sense Mouffe describes. Perhaps the ways in which the directors produce the canon can become more than just an uncritical acceptance of its quality, but also an investigation into what the canon is and could be in contemporary society.

Several scholars have theorised how canonical plays create meaning not only through their content and words but also through their reputation and status in specific cultural contexts. Patrice Pavis notes: 'To put the play onstage is thus to begin to deconstruct its traditional image, while already reconstructing a possible reading' (2013: 163). When performing *Hamlet*, you are not only negotiating Shakespeare's text for a contemporary audience, but you are also negotiating that audience's relationship to *Hamlet* – 'its traditional image' – a relationship that has been built up in the specific culture for centuries. Marvin Carlson writes about this phenomenon of retelling familiar stories and playing with audience expectations. He argues that drama 'has always been centrally concerned not simply with the telling of stories but with the retelling of stories already known to its public' (2001: 17). Carlson coins the term *ghosting* to describe the way in which drama and theatre always invoke past events, not only through plot, but also through performance history and cultural status. He explains:

> [Theatre] is the repository of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts. The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and recollection (2001: 2).

When putting on canonical plays then, directors do not only expose the audience to the play itself – its story, characters and so on – but also to the performance history and cultural status of the play, and these external contexts are as much part of creating meaning as are the internal elements of the play. Carlson notes that the *ghosting* of the text and its cultural standing in the theatre 'is particularly apparent (…) when audiences (…) bring an acquaintance with this preexisting text with them to the theatre' (2001: 16). We see here the similarities of Carlson's exploration of *ghosting* and the playing with audience expectations

that Mørk-Eidem and Arnarsson describe above. The directors seem not only to be conscious about how ghosting happens, but they actually explicitly use it as an integral part in creating meaning for a contemporary audience. They make the canonical status of the plays, the audience's expectations of these plays and ghosting of previous productions and events an explicit part of their staging.

One can find several examples in these directors' work on how they go to great lengths to make their own staging of the canonical text enter a dialogue with the staging history, the cultural context and the audience expectations. This is a particular focus in chapter 4 in this thesis, but some examples are useful at this point. Christopher Rüping's production of *Hamlet* at Münchner Kammerspiele in 2017 gave an interpretation of the Danish prince which differed radically and provocatively from more common views. Rüping points out how 'Hamlet is always perceived in our cultural identity as the archetype of "the doubting man"' (2017). However, to Rüping, 'the text also offers you another Hamlet: the Hamlet (…) who is acting. And he is pretty reckless in that' (2017). For all his contemplation, Hamlet also acts and causes destruction around him. He kills Polonius in a fit of rage, he sends off his two former friends Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths, his actions make Ophelia kill herself, and the final scene ends in a bloodbath where Hamlet is responsible for two deaths. As Rüping points out: 'The text is much more brutal and bloody and bloodthirsty than we all think on the basic level of cultural identity' (2017). This was the point of departure for Rüping's interpretation, where Hamlet was presented as a solo terrorist willing to die for his cause and encouraging others to do the same. The three actors, who alternated all the parts of the play, including Hamlet, between them covered the stage and themselves in blood. In a particularly disturbing scene, Hamlet, then played by Katja Bürkle, spent more than ten minutes verbally abusing Ophelia, played by Nils Kahnwald. Throughout the production, the focus was always on the brutal *actions* carried out by Hamlet. In this way,

Rüping's whole concept was based on challenging the stereotypical view of the Danish prince. This was made explicit at the end of Bürkle's rant; when Kahnwald left the stage, she turned to the audience, blamed them for not understanding her and shouted: 'I free myself from you!'[6]. Bürkle's Hamlet quite explicitly did not want to adhere to the audience's expectation of the character. Rüping insisted that his interpretation of Hamlet as a person of action is present in Shakespeare's text. What he tried to rebel against was not (only) Shakespeare's text, but the views on that text that he believes exist and are ingrained in our 'cultural identity'. As can be seen in the quotes above, Rüping frames his interpretation in direct opposition to what he sees as the more conventional but also insufficient views of Hamlet as the stereotypical 'doubting man'.

A more explicit example of what Marvin Carlson calls 'ghosting' can be seen in Arnarsson's 2017 production of *Hamlet* at Hannover Schauspielhaus. Here, the concept of the production was tied to the fact that *Hamlet* is arguably the most famous and iconic play in the Western world. The production started with Hamlet reading the introductory stage directions and the Dramatis Personae, and at another point, photos of famous Hamlets, including Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh, were projected on the back wall. Thus, Arnarsson made sure that both the text itself and its staging history were explicitly present in the current theatrical event. This was not only a staging of *Hamlet*, but also a staging about the play *Hamlet*, its staging history and cultural status. This was also picked up on by reviewers. Roland Meyer-Arlt commented on the production's zombie-like aesthetics:

> The actors (…) stumble around the stage like the un-dead. And in a way that is what they are. For 400 years the world's playhouses have produced *Hamlet*. For 400 years

[6] This and all other quotations from productions originally performed in German or Norwegian, are translated by me.

something has been rotten in the state of Denmark, and the world has been out of joint (2017).

In his review, Meyer-Arlt saw Arnarsson's production in relation to the staging history and cultural status of the play. Throughout the review, he explicitly sees the production in relation to *Hamlet*'s standing in the theatrical environment in Hannover. He explains that '[s]ixteen years ago Nicolas Stemann's *Hamlet* opened here, a celebrated, exemplary production (…) The memories of it has not faded', and he continues by asking the question: 'Is it at all possible to top this production' (2017)? The rest of the review is an exploration of how Arnarsson's production is, in Meyer-Arlt's view, at least as good and important as Stemann's. Thus, both in the staging itself and in the reception of it Arnarsson's *Hamlet* engaged with its source text not only through story and words, but also through the cultural status of the text and the audience expectation that this status caused. In this instance, Carlson's ghosting is not only something that happens inevitably and coincidentally, but something that the director purposefully employs as part of his staging. However, while these two examples show how the directors deliberately played with the play's canonical status, they do not prove whether such a strategy can be the point of departure for further counter-hegemonic practices in the ways Mouffe describes. This issue will be a main focus in the next chapters of this thesis.

To sum up, the directors I have interviewed argue that in canonical plays, they find not only texts of exceptional quality, as I discussed above, but also texts that are tied to the cultural identity of their audiences in much more powerful ways than less famous or contemporary texts are. In the least radical sense, this gives directors, as Hill-Gibbins describes, more freedom to experiment and present their own interpretation when putting these plays on stage. But as we have seen, some directors suggest that the possibilities are more far-reaching than this. Canonical texts have gained their status partly because they speak directly to a society's cultural identity and they are important expressions of how society sees

and understands itself. At the same time, the canon is constituted and gains its status because it expresses, reproduces and reimposes dominant ideologies in society. Some of the directors I study, particularly Arnarsson and Rüping, suggest that working with canonical texts gives directors the possibilities to question and challenge the ideologies behind the dominant worldviews of society in more insistent ways than is possible with lesser known texts that are not part of our cultural identity to the same degree. Thus, it seems that these directors suggest that interrogating and challenging canonical texts, their values and ideologies, and their position in our culture can question cultural identity in ways that perhaps can be seen in relation to the kind of counter-hegemonic artistic practices Mouffe describes. The directors argue that by not only reproducing, but dissecting the relationship between a canonical text and the receiving culture they can also scrutinise and challenge structures and identifications in culture and society more generally. Theoretically, this seems like a plausible suggestion. If, as I have discussed both in the introduction and in this chapter, the canon is an expression of dominant ideologies and hegemonic structures in society, critically engaging with canonical texts in the theatre might be a point of departure for counter-hegemonic artistic practices – for undermining the canon itself and the values and ideologies it represents. However, the important question is of course whether such counter-hegemonic practices are practically achievable. The next chapters of this thesis explore to what extent such counter-hegemonic practices are actually present in the directors' work and in their productions.

Chapter 3: Working with Canonical Texts

In this chapter, I shift my focus from *why* directors work with canonical plays to *how* they work with such plays, and I focus particularly on the transition from written text to theatrical performance. Patrice Pavis uses the French term 'mise en scene' to describe the way in which a text is used to create a theatrical production. According to Pavis, '[t]he French term 'mise en scene' is in no way the equivalent of 'performance'. (…) [Rather it designates] the passage from the text to the stage, from writing to acting, from page to stage' (2013: 35). In this chapter, I will explore the directors' mise en scene, the way they work to translate the canonical text of the past into a contemporary theatrical performance. By text, at this point in the thesis, I mean mainly the words on the page, but also the situations, actions and processes that these words describe or create. In her book *Theatre-Making. Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century*, Duška Radosavljević argues that the relationship between text and stage production can be seen as one of 'translation'. Radosavljević argues that it is useful to see theatre as constituted by a theatre-language that consists of several elements, including but not limited to verbal language. It is from this point of view that she sees the relation between text and performance as one of translation:

> If we understand the language of theatre as distinct in its vocabulary – by virtue of also containing non-verbal, kinetic, atmospheric, visual elements as well as speech – and if we consider translation as a process of transformation of one object into another, may we consider the process of staging a play as a process of 'translation' of the metaphorical content of the written text into the metaphorical language of the stage (2013: 34)?

In posing this question, Radosavljević suggests seeing text and performance as two different idioms, and staging a play therefore involves processes of translation where elements of the text are reinvented in the language of the stage. In relation to the canonical texts I study, one

can say that the canonical texts of the past are 'translated' into contemporary theatrical expressions (both linguistic and other) that create theatrical performances for today. The focus of this chapter, then, is the different 'translation strategies' the directors I study use in creating their productions of canonical plays.

Seeing the relationship between page and stage as one of translation makes it possible to utilise certain useful terms from translation theory for exploring and analysing this relationship. In her introduction to the book *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat*, Margherita Laera draws on the theories of translation scholar Lawrence Venuti. She describes the following tension in translation practices:

> [A] distinction to be made is between the two largely opposite – but not diametrically opposed – approaches of 'domestication' and 'foreignization'. These terms (…) are now commonly used (…) to differentiate between interlingual translation strategies that aim to make the source text more (domestication) or less (foreignization) familiar to the target reader (2014: 8).

It is important here to acknowledge, as Laera also points out, that domestication and foreignization cannot be seen as two clearly defined opposite strategies or modes of translation. Rather, the two concepts are useful for understanding the choices and ethics involved in the hermeneutic processes of translation. Venuti points to this ethical side of translation when he argues that translation is an interpretive act. To him, a translation is never an exact rendering of the source text, but rather 'one interpretive possibility among others' (2013: 4). Because of this, Venuti also points out that translation always results in 'the inevitable loss of source-cultural difference as well as the exorbitant gain of translating-cultural difference' (2013: 4). Translation always involves losing elements from the source text while gaining elements from the translating language and culture. Venuti calls this aspect of translation an inevitable act of cultural violence, as translation involves 'the reconstitution

of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs, and representations that preexist in the translating language and culture, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality' (2008: 14). However, Venuti also argues that looking at translation as an act of interpretation 'exposes the creative possibilities of translation' (2013: 4). Translation is a process that involves both cultural reconstitutions and creative opportunities. Domestication and foreignization can be seen as concepts that help understand the interpretive and creative act of translations. Domesticating translation practices only acknowledge to a small extent the 'cultural violence' that occurs in translation, and in the hunt for fluidity, such practices risk producing 'ethnocentric reduction[s] of the foreign text to receiving cultural values' (2008: 15). Venuti instead recommends foreignizing strategies, which seek 'to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation' not by presenting an impossible 'transparent representation of an essence that resides in the foreign text', but rather through emphasising 'the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text' (2008: 15-16). The core of Venuti's foreignization is thus to point out and problematise the differences between the translated text and the receiving culture, rather than to smooth over such differences. According to Venuti, foreignizing strategies are the basis for what he calls 'humanistic translation', which he sees as translation practices that traffic 'in linguistic and cultural differences and should not work to diminish them so as to sustain a status quo' (2013: 3). Humanistic translation practices acknowledge the unavoidable differences that occur in translation and attempts to highlight such differences rather than smoothing them over. To sum up, domestication and foreignization cannot be seen as oppositional ways of translating as both are at play in any translation practice. Nevertheless, the two terms are useful in exploring how a translation relates not only to the language, but the cultural contexts and values of the source text and the receiving culture. Laera emphasises that the distinction between domestication and foreignization mainly relates to interlingual translation, but she also argues that the terms can

be useful when discussing 'intertextual stage adaptation' because of 'the interpretative nature of theatrical transposition' (2014: 8). In the kind of theatre I discuss in this thesis, texts from the past are 'translated' into theatrical expressions for a contemporary audience (a kind of equivalent to the 'target reader' in literary translation practicses). Domestication and foreignization can be useful terms when exploring how directors translate canonical texts into the theatre language of performance, as the two terms make it possible to study the effects their translation choices have in the theatrical situation.

In the first part of the chapter, I will focus on directors – Emma Rice and Alexander Mørk-Eidem – who, I argue, use certain domesticating strategies in their productions. As I will show, these directors change both the words and the cultural references in the plays in order to make the plays more accessible to contemporary audiences. Canonical texts from the past can often seem archaic and difficult because the language they are written in and the culture they were written for have since developed. Shakespeare's English is not modern English, and Ibsen's Norwegian has as many similarities to Danish as to contemporary Norwegian. A simple way of starting to make a canonical dramatic text accessible to a contemporary audience is therefore to change archaic words and phrases into more contemporary equivalents. When directors work with texts in translation, this is often one of the pre-set conditions for the work, because, as Patrice Pavis notes, '[a]rchaic text becomes once again readable and current thanks to a new translation. The translator has the possibility of adapting it to the needs of a future staging' (2013: 227).[7] Compared to working in translation, Patrice Pavis notes that '[i]t is obviously more tricky to change texts in their

[7] While, as Pavis points out, a translator has the option to update archaic phrases when translating to a different language, translators do not always choose this option. Also in the theatre, some practitioners, for example Italian director Romeo Castellucci, often choose to keep an archaic and "old" language even in translation because they find the archaic language fits their style and aesthetics better.

original language' (2013: 229). Nevertheless, changing the words of a text during the course of rehearsals is a rather usual approach, also among the directors I study. In the cases of Rice and Mørk-Eidem, I argue that such changes made to the canonical texts have as their main goal to smooth over the difficulties the canonical texts pose and make it easier for the audience to understand the text, the story and the production. I discuss how Alexander Mørk-Eidem and Emma Rice engage with the texts of Shakespeare and Ibsen, how certain domesticating strategies are at work in their stagings, and what kinds of problems the presence of such strategies might pose for the contemporary audience.

In the second part of the chapter, I concentrate on directors and productions that to varying degrees highlight the problems that occur when a canonical text of the past is produced on the contemporary stage, and whose translation practices therefore might be seen as more in line with how Venuti describes foreignizing translation strategies. I discuss two ways of highlighting problems, which are related to two slightly different problems that occur when working with canonical texts. The first problem is related to the texts being from a different (older) culture than our own, and thus presenting sentiments and values that seem uncomfortable or awkward to a contemporary audience. As I discussed in chapter 2, canonical texts are not universal, but firmly of the time they were written in and for. Any play is always to a certain extent bound by the values and traditions of the culture it was produced in. For contemporary theatre, this means that there are elements in older texts that will seem unfamiliar, awkward or uncomfortable on the contemporary stage. I discuss Joe Hill-Gibbins' production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to explore a strategy where the director keeps and highlights the textual passages in the canonical text that seem foreign or awkward to a contemporary audience. The other way of highlighting problems that I discuss is more concerned with the canonical status the text has achieved than with the cultural differences that appear through time. As I demonstrated in chapter two, a canonical text is often well

known, and creating a fresh, new, innovative production of it might seem like a difficult task. In his production of *Hamlet* however, Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson used the fact that the play is well known as the basis for his staging. What Hill-Gibbins' and Arnarsson's strategies have in common is that they turn the special issues that arise when working with canonical texts from potential problems to tools for creating meaning in their productions.

In the third part of the chapter, I will focus on one of the most radical relationships between page and stage that exists among the works of the directors I study, namely Christopher Rüping's production of *Hamlet*. Rüping cut and reworked the Shakespearean text in line with the following description by Peter Boenisch of a trend in continental European directors' theatre:

> [E]specially within the established text-theatre institutions of the European continent, dramaturgic approaches (…) have a long tradition of playfully challenging, even canonical play-texts that emerged under the dramatic paradigm – both full of play and, yet, still full of the play, even though potentially emptied of (some, if not most of) its scripted words (2010: 163-164).

Rüping's production was indeed emptied of most of Shakespeare's scripted words, and adhered to the traditions of playfully challenging texts that Boenisch describes. Avra Sidiropoulou points to how this is a rather common feature of contemporary directors' theatre: '[A]ctors collaborate with directors in interpreting the original *übertext*, (…) expelling the author from the stage' (2011: 49). Elisabeth Leinslie and Anette Therese Pettersen describe a similar trend specifically in German directors' theatre: '[In] German Director's Theatre (…) the dramatic texts become merely a starting point, text a mere material to be moulded by the director' (2015: 15). At first view, using the canonical text merely as source material to be moulded and recreated might come across as a strategy that results in a reduction of the texts' canonical status. Directors find no need to preserve or even stage the

text. Instead they take whatever they find in the text and use it as material for their own expressions. In Rüping's strategy, the canonical text is fragmented in an attempt to open up for the personal reflexivity of the director. However, such fragmentation might actually be a confirmation of canonical status even if the text itself is substantially changed. As mentioned, Jan Gorak argues that an important feature of canonical works is that they become 'the receptacle for all kinds of interpretations' (2014: 63). I hope to show that even if Rüping reworked the text in radical ways, his production was still – as Boenisch writes – 'full of the play', and that Rüping's strategy made Shakespeare's play resonate on the contemporary stage.

This chapter is an exploration of the directors' mise en scène, where this term is understood, as Pavis describes it above, as the passage from page to stage. While all the strategies I discuss in the chapter acknowledge and attempt to deal with canonicity, only some put negotiations of canonicity explicitly on stage. I will argue that it is these kinds of staging strategies that create the most productive engagement with the canon today, because they do not take the canon as self-evident, but rather invite the audience to participate in a reflection of what it means to reproduce the canon in the contemporary theatre.

3.1 Creating understanding

In this first section, I will discuss instances where directors translate the words of canonical texts, even when they work in the original language of that text, in order to facilitate understanding. Of the directors I have interviewed, Emma Rice and Alexander Mørk-Eidem comment on this process explicitly in their interviews, particularly in relation to their productions of respectively Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. Both Shakespeare and Ibsen wrote in languages that were quite different to the contemporary versions of those languages. The English language has evolved significantly since

Shakespeare wrote his plays 400 years ago. Similarly, Arne Torp and Lars Vikør point out that most Norwegian authors in the nineteenth century, including Ibsen, 'published their books with Danish publishers' and that they 'left it to Hegel [the Danish publisher] to finalise their spelling' (1993: 201). Thus, one can say that Ibsen lived in a time where written Norwegian was actually much closer to Danish than to today's Norwegian. In this way, the two playwrights share the feature that, while being firmly canonical in their home countries, their plays are linguistically quite different than the contemporary languages in those countries.

As will be seen in this section, Rice and Mørk-Eidem share some of the same reasons for translating Shakespeare and Ibsen to more contemporary language. Their reasons are often tied to attempts at producing a *meaning* or *effect* in a certain play, passage or character in the contemporary production that is similar to what the play, passage or character might have had when it was first written or performed. The directors acknowledge that they do not have access directly to such meanings or effects, but they argue that it is possible to strive towards them. To be able to do so with playwrights whose language is far removed from the contemporary language may involve changing the actual words to preserve the meanings or effects. In relation with Venuti's concepts above, this practice can be seen as a form of domestication. The old and possibly archaic language of Shakespeare and Ibsen is translated in the contemporary production; not only into a contemporary theatre language, to use Radosavljević's term, but also into a more contemporary verbal language that is more accessible in the receiving culture. However, changing the language to make the experience more accessible for the audience also means that the practice carries with it the dangers of ethnocentric reproduction that Venuti warns against above. While translating the language to achieve familiarity can be a way to get rid of hindrances and facilitate the audience's engagement with the play, the practice can also become patronising and lead to only giving

audiences what they are familiar and comfortable with. In this section, I will explore how Rice and Mørk-Eidem went about working with the texts by Shakespeare and Ibsen to make them more accessible in a contemporary setting, while I will also critically study the assumptions that their practices are based on.

When Emma Rice worked on *Twelfth Night* at The Globe, she changed words and phrases that she found old-fashioned and difficult to understand. This practice resonates with the views translation and literature scholar Susan Bassnett penned in an article in *The Independent* in 2001. Bassnett argues:

> The problem with Shakespeare today is linguistic. The language has become obsolete, Shakespeare's jokes are meaningless, his witticisms miss their target. It isn't the actors' fault: all they can do is struggle to make sense of a language that might as well be Tibetan (2001).

Bassnett argues that Shakespeare's language is firmly of a different time than ours and needs to be made accessible in the contemporary theatre. However, she has little sympathy for directors in her argument, and claims that they are 'unable themselves, I suspect, to understand the text, [and therefore] resort to gimmicks, hiring designers to make the production more "relevant" or "meaningful"' (2001). What she calls for instead are 'good English translators to take Shakespeare in hand and liberate him for a new generation' (2001). Bassnett's argument here is bold and based on her own taste. I do not agree that smoothing out Shakespeare's language by translating his plays into a more contemporary English is the only (or even the best) way of making Shakespeare resonate today (the two other sections of this chapter, for example, show completely different ways directors work with Shakespeare and other canonical texts). However, her argument is descriptive of a practice that can be found in Rice's work with Shakespeare's text (and also in Mørk-Eidem's work with Ibsen, which I discuss below).

A telling example of Rice rewriting the text in *Twelfth Night* occurred early in the play when Viola understands that her brother Sebastian is probably dead. At this point, Shakespeare has written the following line: 'My brother, he is in Elysium' (Shakespeare, 2016: 1.2.3). Rice's reaction to the line, as she described it in my interview with her, was as follows: 'Well, nobody in the middle of London is going to understand that' (2017). The belief that a contemporary London audience would struggle with the line made her change it to: 'My brother is in a watery grave' (2017). This new line keeps the rhythm of the blank verse, but is perhaps easier to understand for a contemporary audience, and it is important for Rice that the language helps the audience understand the story: 'It's a massive drop point [and it is important] for the audience to understand what Viola understands at that point. It's like putting money in my story bank' (2017). Making the line more accessible helps Rice tell the story, something she sees as a main goal. For her, the telling of the story is the most important feature in the theatre she wishes to create, and textual specificities are less important than the general flow of the story. Taking Bassnett's argument above into consideration, Rice liberates the play by taking away foreign elements that distance both actors and audience members from it. Instead, the audience can concentrate on the story that the flow of the words creates.

Rice continued this practice throughout the production. Perhaps the most drastic step was to cut almost all the lines of Feste the fool. Feste is a character that exemplifies some of the difficulties that occur when working with Shakespeare's texts today. The function of the Fool was well known in the Renaissance but does not really exist in contemporary society. In addition, Feste is one of the play's main representatives of the kinds of jokes and witticisms Bassnett complains about above, and his lines are wordy and often depend on intricate puns with unfamiliar words and references specific to the social and cultural life of the Renaissance era, such as the following example: 'I did impeticos thy gratillity; for Malvolio's nose is no whipstock: my lady has a white hand, and the Myrmidons are no bottle-ale houses'

(Shakespeare, 2016: 2.3.22-24). Instead of keeping such intricate lines, the role of Feste was transformed in Rice's production, where the drag-artist Le Gateau Chocolat played a sort of narrator and cabaret singer in place of Feste. Many of the songs Le Gateau Chocolat performed borrowed pieces of Feste's text, intermingled with popular and more contemporary hit songs. In this way, Feste's insider wordplay was changed into contemporary music and references. When Rice removed the 'original' Feste from the play, the audience was presented with jokes and points that depend on an understanding of Elizabethan England to a lesser extent. These points were exchanged for elements specifically designed to create recognition and familiarity in a contemporary audience, such as continual references to Sister Sledge's hit song 'We are Family'. Thus, while almost all of Feste's text was cut from the production, the part Le Gateau Chocolat played in the production shared some important features and functions that Feste has in Shakespeare's text. Many of Feste's jokes are based on the cultural specificities of Elizabethan life, and similarly Le Gateau Chocolat referred to contemporary popular culture in both her appearance and in some of her jokes. Similarly, both Feste in Shakespeare's original and Le Gateau Chocolat in Rice's version provided musical interludes. In this way, while Rice got rid of almost all of Feste's text, she kept many of the functions this character has in Shakespeare's play, such as being a provider of jokes and music. Rice of course works on many different levels other than the textual, including the visual and the musical (the production of Twelfth Night, for example, was pervaded by music and musicality), and perhaps Bassnett would see some of her staging choices as 'gimmicks'. However, on a textual level, Rice's practice seems to answer Bassnett's request for Shakespeare to be translated in the sense that she changed aspects of Shakespeare's text that might seem foreign to a contemporary audience. This can be seen both in how she treated singular lines and in the treatment of the whole character of Feste.

Similarly, Alexander Mørk-Eidem also changed and updated the language in his production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, and, as I will show, he can be seen to have taken an even more 'authorial function' than the one Rice took through the revisions I described above. *Peer Gynt* is an extremely complex play that, among other things, satirises specific events and people in Norway at the time it was written. According to famous Norwegian author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, who reviewed the play shortly after its publication in 1867, *Peer Gynt* 'is a satire on Norwegian love of oneself, narrow-mindedness, self-righteousness' (2018, my translation). Bjørnson's review also shows how *Peer Gynt* at the time it was written was perceived in reference to contemporary political issues. Bjørnson refers to how 'it is clear' that Ibsen wrote the play because 'of our people's relation to Denmark in its hardship (during the war and since)' (2018, my translation). The war mentioned is the Second Schleswig War in 1864, and Norway's relation to Denmark during and after this is not particularly well known in contemporary Norway (according to Ibsen and Bjørnson, Norway had not done enough to help the Danes). *Peer Gynt* is of course a play that works on many different levels in addition to contemporary social and political satire. It can be seen as an allegory of life or as a partly romantic portrayal of 'traditional Norwegian culture'. However, Bjørnson's remarks tie the play explicitly to its contemporary political contexts, and thereby they show the importance of this reading when the play was first published. As Mørk-Eidem himself argues, many of these people and events are things 'we after the hundred-or-so years that have passed no longer have any relation to' (2017). This problem prompted Mørk-Eidem to change the words of the text, or, as he describes it himself, 'translate the play, (…) but in a way that creates the same effect in the audience today as it had when it was first performed' (2017). Most of his rewritings in *Peer Gynt* were aimed towards this goal.

This goal of creating a similar effect in the audience to the effect the play had when first performed needs to be discussed. One can argue, as Avra Sidiropoulou does, that when it

comes to setting a canonical play into a contemporary context, '[t]he real challenge continues to be how to come up with modern-day equivalents to evoke in the modern spectator, to the degree that it is possible, the same feeling of unadulterated response that a given play had produced in its original audience' (2011: 98). This is a very similar argument to what Mørk-Eidem expresses above. In this view, it is most important to explore what kind of meanings the play might have had in the time it was written and translate these meanings in relation to contemporary society. Mørk-Eidem emphasises that one cannot of course know for sure what a play meant at the time of its origin, but he argues that 'one can read reviews, look at the response and what was written at the time [in order to] get a sort of feeling [of] what kind of performance this was on opening night' (2017). Thus, Mørk-Eidem argues that even if we cannot know for sure, it is possible to discover roughly what the main meanings in the play were in the time it was written and first performed, and one can then use the play for similar effects today. In the case of *Peer Gynt*, the play was read as social and political satire in 1867, and can be utilised for similar social and political satire today. However, it is important to acknowledge that it is impossible to create linguistic and cultural equivalents. The 'unadulterated response' Sidiropoulou mentions above, is not accessible in a contemporary performance, because both the context and the audience of the performance are of a radically different time. Searching for such 'unadulterated response' must to a certain extent be seen as an unattainable fantasy. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Venuti argues that translation is always an act of violence in which the foreign text is reconstituted 'in accordance with values, beliefs, and representations that preexist in the translating language and culture' (2008: 14). Even when, as Mørk-Eidem describes, researching a play's original meanings, the translation of these meanings and the creation of similar effects today always happen from a contemporary position and from within a contemporary system of values and

ideologies. One can perhaps attempt to strive towards a similar effect, but one can never actually achieve the original meanings.

Nevertheless, while Mørk-Eidem does acknowledge that his research can only lead him so far, he used this research to attempt to create similar effects in his 2014 production of *Peer Gynt* as Ibsen's text might have had in the 1860s. This was particularly evident in how his production referenced situations, debates and people from contemporary Norwegian society, in a similar way to how Bjørnson describes Ibsen's text above. A simple example was when Peer left the Hall of the Mountain King, and one of the trolls shouted after him: 'Morna, Peer' ('Good bye, Peer'), a phrase made famous on the night of the 2013 general election in Norway when leader of the political party Fremskrittspartiet (The Progress Party) and one of the election winners, Siv Jensen, shouted 'Morna Jens' ('Good bye, Jens') in reference to the then outgoing prime minister Jens Stoltenberg. The reference was made particularly clear because the troll wore a dress similar to the one Jensen used on election night. This update is crude and explicit and might seem almost cheap and overdone. However, Mørk-Eidem argues that Ibsen also 'got critiqued for being vulgar' in his language, 'particularly in the parts (…) where his contemporary audience could see that he spoke about something concrete in Norway that everyone knew about' (2017). In these ways, Mørk-Eidem's goal with his updated language was to recreate some of the same *effects* as the play had when Ibsen wrote it. His goal is for the audience, at least to a certain degree, to experience the performance as speaking directly to them in their own contemporary context, rather than presenting them with a window to the past. The canonical play should be experienced as contemporary, even if that, as Mørk-Eidem acknowledges, might be an impossibility.

Rewritten phrases and sections of text authored by Mørk-Eidem himself continued to run through the whole production. This is particularly significant in a play like *Peer Gynt*, which in Ibsen's original is written in rhyme. The phrases and sections written by Mørk-

Eidem were also written in rhyme, and this highlights the extent to which Mørk-Eidem took on an authorial function. As Mørk-Eidem describes it: 'it took ages just to invent new rhymes, it's not easy at all' (2017). The text that was presented on stage was very much a hybrid: Ibsen's frame story and much of his text, interspersed with new sections of text written by Mørk-Eidem the author-director. In addition to simply creating a better understanding of the old play, Mørk-Eidem mentioned another reason for changing text, which is specifically relevant to plays of canonical status. Shakespeare has created many words and phrases for the English language, and Ibsen has done the same for Norwegian. Tom Stern calls such phrases in plays 'words of wisdom': '[T]hese are the sorts of phrases that get quoted independently of their dramatic context' (2014: 51). A result of this is that it can, at times, be impossible to attend a performance of plays by these authors without noticing the 'words of wisdom'. In the interview, Mørk-Eidem recounted how he encountered this problem when he directed Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881) at The National Theatre in Oslo in 2006. He found that 'pithy one-liners and sayings that Ibsen created and that have become part of the Norwegian language (…) work as a kind of Verfremdungseffekt' (2017). Tom Stern argues that 'words of wisdom, even when they appear explicitly in plays, are often woven into the action. They are not best understood as isolated statements by the playwright, in which he discloses his general views about the world' (2014: 51). However, in the case of canonical texts of great status and fame (such as the most famous Ibsen plays in Norway), it is almost impossible not to read the 'words of wisdom' as famous quotes from the playwright. Many audience members immediately recognise such phrases as the quotes from the playwright or as well-known sayings, not as part of the story, and this might disturb their experience of the play as such.

Mørk-Eidem encountered this problem of words of wisdom also when he directed *Peer Gynt*. *Peer Gynt* is, at least in relation to language, perhaps the most well-known Ibsen play in Norway, and many of the play's phrases have become part of the Norwegian

language, much in the same way Shakespearean phrases have in English. The sense of dealing with 'famous quotes' is only enhanced by the fact that the play is written in rhyme. Many of the lines read almost like rhyming proverbs. Below is one example from Peer's meeting with the Boyg that have become well known in the Norwegian language due to its proverbial qualities:

> Fram og tilbake er like *langt*
>
> Ut og inn er like *trangt* (Ibsen, 1972: 613, my italics).
>
> (Forward or back, it's equally far.
>
> Outside or in, I'm still confined (Ibsen, 2000: 72).)

Mørk-Eidem kept many of these phrases, but he also added many of his own. These often sounded similar to Ibsen's rhyming phrases, but they utilised contemporary words and references, and thus it was possible for the audience to discern Ibsen's rhymes from the new rhymes. One example that clearly used more contemporary words than Ibsen's, was the Mountain King, here portrayed as famous Norwegian investor Olav Thon, who instructed the trolls to give Peer a tail:

> Sett den på rette *plassen*
>
> og kjør den så langt som mulig opp i *rassen*!
>
> (Put it in the right place
>
> and stick it as far as possible up his ass)

While this line in form is quite similar to Ibsen's rhyming language, the word 'rassen' (slang for ass) is not a word one expects to find in *Peer Gynt*. Some of Mørk-Eidem's rhymes were also particularly related to issues in contemporary life. For example, when the Mountain King/Thon returned at the end of the play, he regretted many points of his life, but one in particular:

> Det dummeste jeg noen gang har gjort i mitt *liv*

er å gi min stemme i valget til *Siv*.

(The most stupid thing I ever did in my life

was to vote for Siv in the election.)

Siv Jensen is as mentioned the leader of right-wing party Fremskrittspartiet. She was appointed Minister of Finance after the 2013 election, in which she also received support from Olav Thon. The remark is thus an example of how Mørk-Eidem connected Ibsen's play to explicit contemporary events and issues. Hearing such events and issues debated in rhyme created an extra level of enjoyment for the audience, and recognition of this created many funny moments and laughs when I saw the production. The rhymes also allowed Mørk-Eidem to create similar kinds of political satire in rhyme that Ibsen did in the context of the 1860s. The satire does not necessarily call for a similar response from the contemporary audience, but it creates a similar political tone for the play as it might have had in Ibsen's time.

Figure 1: Eindride Eidsvold (Peer) and Marika Enstad (Troll/Siv Jensen) in Mørk-Eidem's production of Peer Gynt *at Nationaltheatret, Oslo. Finn Schau (The Mountain King/Olav Thon) can be seen in the background. Photo: Gisle Bjørnebye.*

Mørk-Eidem's practice of rewriting and adding text can be seen as making the text more accessible in three slightly different ways. First, Mørk-Eidem interspersed Ibsen's at times archaic rhymes with his own, which are based on contemporary words and references, thus making a clearer connection to the world of the audience. Secondly, also the more difficult or inaccessible rhymes became more understandable, as Mørk-Eidem did not passively accept them but exploited them for being rhetorical effects. The rhyming, both Ibsen's and Mørk-Eidem's, was exploited as an enjoyable feature in and of itself, not only as part of telling the story. Third, by creating new 'proverbial' rhymes, Mørk-Eidem contextualised the power of Ibsen's 'words of wisdom', which were put in dialogue with his own writings. Rather than standing out as 'Verfremdungseffekts', Ibsen's rhyming couplets were engaged in a play with rhymes and language that was one of the main pillars in Mørk-Eidem's staging.

For both Rice and Mørk-Eidem then, story or effect is more important than the literal words in a canonical play. These two directors do not shy away from changing the text, but the goal is always to create a better understanding of characters and plots for the contemporary audience within the specific production. Usually, this understanding is tied to attempts of making a character or a sequence retaining a similar effect to what the play might have had when it was first written, even if the directors also acknowledges the impossibility of this goal. In Rice's *Twelfth Night*, the character of Le Gateau Chocolat served several of the same functions as Feste does in Shakespeare's play, even if most of Feste's text was cut. In Mørk-Eidem's *Peer Gynt*, references to public debate in the 1860s were replaced with contemporary public figures and issues. Mørk-Eidem also sought to demystify the function of famous quotes and passages by changing, omitting or playing with them. Thus, the language was changed in the two productions, but this was only done in an attempt to achieve a similar effect to what the plays might have had in the context they were written in. In a sense, the two

directors almost seemed to attempt to escape the canonicity of Shakespeare and Ibsen. By striving towards creating *similar effects* to what the plays created when they were first written, the plays' specific language and wording, as well as their history and status in our cultural consciousness became less important.

Emma Rice relates the process of rewriting texts to make them more accessible to elitism in the theatre. She explains: '[T]hat's where the whole elitist-argument comes in, because when you've studied Shakespeare, you learn what these words mean, and you do love them, because knowledge brings a great enjoyment' (2017). Here, Rice is referring to the point I mentioned in the previous chapter – one of the core concepts underlying Bourdieu's theory of 'cultural capital', namely that taste is something that is learnt and acquired. As Bourdieu puts it: 'Any legitimate work tends in fact to impose the norms of its own perception and tacitly defines as the only legitimate mode of perception the one which brings into play a certain disposition and a certain competence' (2010: 20). Shakespeare's plays invite readers and audiences to perceive them in certain ways, and these ways are not obvious or natural, but must be learnt and acquired. If you have studied Shakespeare, his language and style becomes part of the enjoyment of the plays. You are familiar with the dispositions and competences the plays define as 'the only legitimate mode of perception'. However, if one is less familiar with Shakespeare and his language, the language and form, according to Rice, can become a hindrance to experiencing the play. She continues the quote above by emphasising: 'I'm not that person. I haven't had that training. And I don't make theatre for those people' (2017). She does not identify with the cultural capital perceived as important to understand Shakespeare 'unmodified' (even if, as we have seen, she very often chooses to work on plays, texts and stories associated with exactly this kind of cultural capital). Instead she aims, through for example rewriting, to make his plays accessible to larger audiences. To

her, rewriting Shakespeare becomes almost a democratic project, where the goal is to make as many people as possible understand and experience Shakespeare on their own terms.

However, even if the reasons behind changing the words of canonical plays are noble and democratic, it is still possible to critique the practice. I have already mentioned above how it is impossible to actually achieve either linguistic or cultural equivalents to features of canonical plays. It is not possible to access the plays as they were accessed in their own time. However, this is not exactly what Rice and Mørk-Eidem proposes in their strategy. They do not set out to find linguistic or cultural equivalents of every aspect of the original play. Rather, they find and choose certain aspects of what the canonical plays might have meant or certain effects they might have had in their original context, and they explore ways of producing similar meanings or effects today. As written, the character of Feste did not work in Rice's production. However, Rice preserved some of the character's dramaturgical functions, such as providing songs, jokes and narrating certain parts of the action. The result was the role played by Le Gateau Chocolat. Similarly, when reading about *Peer Gynt*, Mørk-Eidem found that Ibsen actually made quite overt and crude critical references to figures and issues in Norway in his time. Mørk-Eidem wanted to produce similar references and critiques of contemporary Norwegian society. Thus, the strategy of rewriting to achieve similar meanings or effects is not about finding linguistic and cultural equivalents, but about releasing certain potentials in canonical plays for a contemporary context.

A slightly different and perhaps more pertinent point of criticism can however be made if we see Rice's and Mørk-Eidem's strategies above as processes where the director works as a mediator of the text and decides what is possible for a contemporary audience to understand and what is not. Rice changes words that she believes 'nobody in the middle of London is going to understand', and Mørk-Eidem argues that he seeks to avoid any form of Verfremdungseffekt and distancing created by famous or archaic passages. Thus, Mørk-

Eidem and Rice seem to attempt to smooth out the experience for the audience, an approach that could be viewed as patronising. Avra Sidiropoulou writes rather critically of the director as mediator between playwright and spectator. She sees in this a negative hierarchy:

> the director, a "servant" to the playwright's text, is at best a secondhand intermediary between the world and the actors (who actually, in turn, become interpreters of the director's interpretation of the playwright's text). At the bottom of this pyramid of involved perception, the spectator poses as the end receiver of the initial conception of the world (2011: 39).

In Sidiropoulou's description, a negative hierarchy is created because the spectator is not allowed to engage directly with the source text and only gets access to what is presented by the director. The process I have described above does not involve Rice and Mørk-Eidem becoming 'servants' to the playwrights' text, but their strategy of changing the text in order to create understanding does involve a hierarchy where they decide, to put it crudely, what the audience is supposed to understand and, perhaps more problematically, what they are capable of understanding. Directing, to a certain extent, always involves deciding what the audience are allowed to see and hear, but Rice's and Mørk-Eidem's strategies above highlight how this also can become problematic because the director makes decisions on behalf of their audience and only serve them what they supposedly already know and are used to. The process of changing texts to create understanding is in danger of over-simplifying, and this can actually diminish the power of theatre by making theatre a place where we confirm what we already know instead of a place where we also investigate new possibilities. Rice's and Mørk-Eidem's productions do not completely fall into this trap, but their strategies open up for these kinds of problematic issues. However, the theatre does not have to be a place that only gives people what they are already familiar with. Smoothing out the foreign, archaic or problematic features of canonical plays is not the only way of making them resonate in contemporary

theatre. The next section is concerned with directors who make such foreign and problematic features of canonical plays explicit parts of their staging.

3.2 Highlighting problems

In this section, I explore a strategy where directors actually use the foreign or problematic features of a play explicitly in their staging. I discuss two slightly different approaches to this strategy. First, I discuss Joe Hill-Gibbins' production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which he challenged some of the power relations in the play, particularly between Oberon and Titania. Hill-Gibbins' challenges were thus towards something in the content of the play itself. This differs from Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson's production of *Hamlet*, which I discuss in the second part of the section. Here, the problem that was challenged was actually the over-familiarity of *Hamlet* as canonical text. Arnarsson acknowledged that it is almost impossible to create a novel production of a play many audience members will know so well, and in many ways, he made this point the basis of his staging.

When Joe Hill-Gibbins works on productions of plays by Shakespeare and other early modern playwrights, he does not rewrite in the sense of changing the words, but he claims to be very much aware of how early modern plays were written for another time and with a different world view, and that is part of what attracts him to them. He explains:

> So, the fact that they come from a different time means that they often (…) are much more extreme and brutal, and much less politically correct (…) They present the (…) world as a much crueller place often. And I find that – bizarrely, ironically – that seems to fit the way I (…) interpret the world to be (2017).

Although Hill-Gibbins finds this different world-view interesting, it can of course also create problems, in the sense that the plays present stories that are not only difficult to understand

but morally and politically problematic to modern-day sensibilities. Hill-Gibbins uses the example of the relationship between Oberon and Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> Titania says (…): 'I have forsworn his bed and company' (Shakespeare, 2016a: 2.1.62). And in a rage this man drugs his wife with the specific intention that she should have sex with an animal and with the specific intention – I mean, it's never explicitly (…) stated, but it's quite hard to come to another conclusion than that the purpose of that is to somehow degrade or shame her or humiliate her. And that in the play she does have sex with this animal, or this half-man-half-animal-creature. And when she wakes up from that she returns to her husband and says that she loves him. So this [is a] story about this man who drugs his wife to tame her or humiliate her, and how that returns her to him, [and] I think [that] is a bad story (2017).

While the story of Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be interpreted in different ways, Hill-Gibbins' reading draws attention to some important points. The treatment of Titania seems awkward from a modern-day point of view, particularly because Oberon's plan seemingly works. When Oberon wakes Titania from her dreams, she does not know that he is involved in what she has experienced, and her reaction is, as Hill-Gibbins points out, to seek comfort from him, the man who tricked her, with the words: 'My Oberon! what visions have I seen!' (Shakespeare, 2016a: 4.1.533). For contemporary audiences, in a world where gender equality is usually seen as a goal and a virtue, the success of Oberon's trick is problematic.

Hill-Gibbins' strategy for tackling this storyline was not to rewrite the words of Shakespeare's play. Instead he looked for what he called a different 'route through the story' (2017). Hill-Gibbins suggests that 'Elizabethan plays, but maybe all great plays in general, (…) are so energised by contradiction (…) They offer so many multiple meanings, that actually (…) what you want is already there in the play' (2017). I have previously criticised the view of canonical texts as always relevant to new settings and contexts, and this quote

shows how Hill-Gibbins subscribes to this view. However, Hill-Gibbins' belief in how Shakespeare's plays are energised by contradiction leads him, in this instance, to look beyond the most obvious or superficial stories and meanings and look for different possible routes that seem more in line with his contemporary world view. His strategy is to look for meanings in the text other than the most obvious or superficial ones, and through this he finds ways to present the problematic storylines that make them work better in a contemporary setting. In the case of Oberon and Titania, he saw how:

> for the vast majority of the play, all [the] couples [Oberon and Titania, Theseus and Hippolyta, Lysander and Hermia, Helena and Demetrius] are having (…) a really bad time. There's only one couple that has a good time, and that's Bottom and Titania (2017).

In his production, Bottom and Titania's happiness was highlighted throughout. The scenes between the two in the forest were filled with energy and joy, while Titania's relief when Oberon woke her up was downplayed. At the end of the play, all the characters ended up in a dance together, and the leaders of the dance were once again Bottom and Titania, even if Anastasia Hille, who played Hippolyta/Titania, was technically portraying Hippolyta at this point and Leo Hill's Bottom no longer was transformed into a donkey. The way in which they behaved towards each other, however, seemed to suggest a kind of recognition and memory of the earlier scenes in the forest, a memory that also was evoked in the audience. Thus, even the final image of the production was of a happy Titania and Bottom, and whether Oberon's plan had actually succeeded was debatable. In this way, Hill-Gibbins' strategy can almost be seen as rewriting, but not the rewriting of words. Instead, Hill-Gibbins rewrites and weights differently the meanings of the words and storylines (or at least the most obvious or superficial ones) so that several interpretations are possible at once and in this way, he encourages the audience to reflect on the problematic features of Shakespeare's play.

It is important to comment on two points with regards to Hill-Gibbins' strategy. First, as Hill-Gibbins himself is very keen to emphasise, the alternative readings he finds are perceived to be somehow present in the text. He notes that even if people sometimes tell him that he is 'really trying to attack the play (…), it's not that difficult to find a particular route through it, because the plays are so complex' (2017). That Shakespeare's plays are particularly complex and give room for several interpretations is a popular perception. Polish Shakespearean Jan Kott, for example, puts forward an argument similar to Hill-Gibbins' in quite romantic words: 'Shakespeare is like the world, or life itself. Every historical period finds in him what it is looking for and what it wants to see' (1988: 5). In the example above, Hill-Gibbins wanted to highlight the happiness Titania found in her relationship with Bottom rather than the oppressive relationship she is in with Oberon. Importantly, Hill-Gibbins perceives both of these elements to be present in Shakespeare's text, and this is what made it possible for him to, as Kott phrases it, 'find in Shakespeare what [he] is looking for and what [he] wants to see'. However, Hill-Gibbins is not oblivious to the fact that Shakespeare's texts are not timeless and universal. To Kott, Shakespeare's plays are so complex that it is possible to discover 'in Shakespeare's plays problems that are relevant to our own time' (1988: 5). Hill-Gibbins instead actively points to parts of the text that he sees as less relevant to, or at least he finds sit less comfortable in, our own time, and he uses such moments productively in his mise en scène. Canonical writers wrote in other cultural contexts than our own, and at times they present sentiments that are not only incomprehensible, but explicitly challenging to modern values. Hill-Gibbins strategy makes it possible for him to challenge and reflect on such problematic features in his productions of canonical plays.

Secondly, it is important to emphasise that Hill-Gibbins' alternative readings do not seek to hide or escape the problematic sentiments of the canonical texts. In his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon's plan was played out in its entirety, but the way

Titania's happiness with Bottom was weighted, challenged the concept of Oberon as winner. The goal is thus not to take the problems away, but rather to highlight them as problems and challenge them. Instead of editing out problematic elements, Hill-Gibbins' strategy tackles them head on, making the interrogation of such problematic elements visible on stage. In this way, Hill-Gibbins' direction can be seen in light of the differences between domestication and foreignization strategies of translation that I have pointed to above. Hill-Gibbins does not smooth over or domesticate the problematic elements of Elizabethan plays by making them more understandable and comprehensive with contemporary sentiments. Actually, as we have seen, the fact that the plays often challenge contemporary sentiments is part of what attracts him to them. Rather, he wants to challenge both the plays and the audience through highlighting where the differences between the two lie, a practice that is similar to how Venuti describes 'foreignizing' translation practices as emphasising 'the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text' (2008: 15-16). In his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hill-Gibbins highlighted cultural differences between Shakespeare's text and contemporary sensibilities, such as Titania's oppressive relationship to Oberon, and he discussed such issues through his staging. Rather than smoothing out or domesticating the experience for the audience, Hill-Gibbins made the difficult features part of his interpretation.

Figure 2: Leo Bill as Bottom in Hill-Gibbins' production of A Midsummer Night's Dream *at the Young Vic Theatre, London. Photo: Keith Pattison.*

Hill-Gibbins' way of challenging the problematic aspects of the canonical texts can be said to be rather subtle, and it is tied to the actual content of the play. A different and more explicit approach can be seen in Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson's production of *Hamlet.* The problems Arnarsson exploited in this production were not related to the content of the play, but rather to the fact that *Hamlet* is so well-known that Arnarsson must expect at least some members of the audience to know it and to attend the production with preconceived ideas about the play. The notion of retelling old stories is of course not a new one in the theatre, but can rather be seen as one of the oldest practices in Western theatre and beyond. As I mentioned in chapter two, Marvin Carlson argues this point in the following way: 'Among all literary forms it is the drama preeminently that has always been centrally concerned not simply with the telling of stories but with the retelling of stories already known to its public' (2001: 17). When dealing with stories as famous and well known as *Hamlet*, it might seem difficult to surprise and engage the audience through the story alone, since they already might know it. Carlson argues:

> the sought-for effect in such drama relies primarily upon an audience's binocular vision – its members' familiarity with the previous treatment of this same material and their ability to draw comparisons between that and the new, rival treatment (2001: 27).

This 'binocular vision' is what Arnarsson exploited in a very direct and explicit way in his production. Instead of trying to create a new interpretation of the story for this kind of spectator, Arnarsson made the audience's knowledge of the play the main conflict of his staging. He used every opportunity to emphasise Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as pre-written text, and incorporated the differences between this text, previous stagings of this text and his own staging in the performance. Arnarsson's strategy is similar to a shift of emphasis that occurs in Brechtian theory: the shift from what (the plot, characters, content) to how (the techniques with which plot, characters, content are presented). In the foreword to *The Rise and Fall of*

the City of Mahagonny, Brecht presents a table of shifts of emphasis between dramatic and epic theatre. The first shift is from 'action' in dramatic theatre to 'narration' in epic theatre (2015: 65). Here we see the shift from the content to the way this content is narrated. In Arnarsson's *Hamlet* a similar shift occurred: the focus was no longer only the story of *Hamlet* but rather the way Arnarsson, his team and his actors engaged with this story and presented it on stage.

The script itself was very much present throughout Arnarsson's staging. One of the first things that happened when the lights went down was that the audience heard the voice of Daniel Nerlich (playing Hamlet) reading the character list from the script: '*Hamlet* von William Shakespeare. Personen des Dramas: Claudius, König von Dänemark, Hamlet, sein Neffe und Prinz von Dänemark' etc. Nerlich/Hamlet continued to read the whole dramatis personae. After some of the smaller parts, such as Voltemand and Cornelius, he also said: 'Gestrichen' ('Cut'). These parts were indeed cut, and so already here the relationship between Shakespeare's play and Arnarsson's staging was directly in focus. Similarly, at other points in the play, Nerlich/Hamlet would say for example: 'Polonius ab', and Polonius was actually forced to leave the stage. These moments corresponded with the actual exits in the text, but here they were introduced by Hamlet, and the other characters had to exit. Thus, it was clearly emphasised in the staging that the performance was based on a pre-written text. Instead of trying to create a fictional world on stage, the main point of the staging was rather to exploit the rupture between the written text and the performance. It is important here to emphasise that the relationship between text, theatre and 'the real world' is also a very important theme in the play *Hamlet*. Laura Visconti notes that '[i]n *Hamlet* the idea of playing, acting and performing, and its related imagery, is not circumscribed but runs through the whole drama' (1990: 200). Examples of references to the relationship between performance and reality in the play are for example Hamlet's decision 'to put an antic

disposition on' (to pretend to be mad and his subsequent possible descent into madness) and the play-within-the-play that supposedly reveals the truth about Old Hamlet's murder (Shakespeare, 2016b: 5.170). Thus, Arnarsson's strategy is not completely detached from the action and themes of Shakespeare's play. Rather, Arnarsson uses the theatricality already present in the play and the status the play has achieved as text as the basis for his own staging which focuses, as mentioned, on the rupture between page and stage.

As the examples above illustrate, in the first part of Arnarsson's production, the character of Hamlet seemed to be aware of and in control of the text and thereby also of the staging of this text. However, this changed radically about halfway through the performance. Suddenly, Hamlet discovered the prompter sitting in the first row. He jumped down from the stage and tore the script from her, only to realise that he was holding the pre-written story about himself in his hands. When the other actors confirmed that the stranger in the first row was Annette, the prompter, and that they themselves where only actors pretending to be in the story, Hamlet's world fell apart. He was no longer in control of the text, but rather the other actors and Arnarsson's production controlled him. The rest of the performance became a conflict between the actors who many times wanted to get to the ending as fast as possible, and Hamlet/Nerlich who insisted on performing the whole play in his own way. This conflict reached its peak when Laertes returned to court, finding it drenched in blood with Ophelia drowned in a coffin (also filled with blood) centre stage. Upon seeing the chaos that the court had descended into, Laertes called the show to a halt and declared that because the situation was so crazy with both his father and sister dead, there would be no performance of the fifth act. He called in the stagehands, who started to remove the set. However, Hamlet/Nerlich insisted on continuing. He desperately needed to perform Shakespeare's play to its end, sword-fight and all, and he even threatened to start from the top again once the end was reached. In this way, Hamlet/Nerlich seemed to be trapped within Shakespeare's pre-written

script, not unlike the characters in Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) whom the character of the Father describes as caught in '[t]he eternal moment' with 'no other reality behind the illusion' (1995: 51, 55).

Thus, in Arnarsson's version of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's text and its canonical status were not an invisible prerequisite, but explicitly present in the staging. Words were added and rewritten, but this was not the main point, as this was not only a staging of the text but also of the process of staging the text. Karen Jürs-Munby has written about performances that display the written text directly and thus create 'a visible reminder of their speech's origin in writing' (2010: 102). She writes that such performances 'thrive, in various ways, on the openly exhibited tensions between text and performance/performers, which in these postdramatic pieces have supplanted the 'suspense' associated with dramatic theatre' (2010: 112).[8] This is exactly what happened in Arnarsson's *Hamlet*. Here, the main conflict was no longer between the prince of Denmark and the life surrounding him, represented by his corrupt uncle and the court. Instead, it was the conflict between the performers, and most notably between Daniel Nerlich as Hamlet and Shakespeare's text that became the most important conflict in the performance. *Hamlet* is possibly the most influential play in the Western world, and it is virtually impossible either to stage or watch it without considering the cultural importance of the text and the memory of the many productions that have already been done. Instead of attempting to make a 'new interpretation', Arnarsson, perhaps prompted by the theatricality already present in the play, made the cultural status of the play and its main character the central conflict of his production. In chapter four, I will continue this discussion of

[8] Jürs-Munby here refers to 'postdramatic theatre' – a categorisation that perhaps does not fit Arnarsson's staging. However, the title of her article refers to 'displayed texts' in '*contemporary* theatre' (my italics), and this suggest that the description has a wider impact area than the narrower 'postdramatic'. In any case, I find her notions useful in discussing Arnarsson's *Hamlet*.

Arnarsson's *Hamlet* with a specific focus on how the canonicity of the play and of the title character was incorporated in the staging.

I would argue that there are certain similarities between Arnarsson's and Hill-Gibbins' strategies as I have discussed them here. Both directors highlight and challenge problematic features of the text. For Hill-Gibbins, these features are inside the text, in its content, whereas for Arnarsson they are outside the text, in the text's status in the culture within which he works. Nevertheless, both of them use techniques to highlight elements of the text, which they believe will seem foreign or strange or problematic to the audience, and they use such elements as turning points for their productions. Unlike many of Mørk-Eidem's and Rice's strategies above, Hill-Gibbins and Arnarsson do not necessarily make the canonical plays more accessible to the audience and they do not seek in their stagings to create 'similar effects' to what the plays might have had when they were written. Hill-Gibbins and Arnarsson do not hide the problems they encounter when working on these canonical texts. Instead they emphasise such problems, questioning and challenging them explicitly on stage. In this way, it becomes impossible for the audience to passively accept the framework of the canonical texts. Rather, the audience is asked to take a stance regarding these texts and question their status as canonical. In a much more explicit way, this is also the goal for Christopher Rüping's methods for working with texts, which I will discuss in the next section.

3.3 Deconstructing the text

So far, I have discussed directors who rewrite the words of the playwright and directors who highlight problematic features of the canonical texts and use these features in their staging. In the following, I will describe a working method that goes further in deconstructing the text. Christopher Rüping's way of working involves deconstructing the play as dramatic text and using it as basis for his own contemporary production. In the interview, Rüping explains that

the first thing he usually does when he encounters a canonical text, is to 'cross out every name, so the play just becomes a text. Just text. And without any stage directions, without any 'this is that role' and stuff like that. It's only a text' (2017). He then goes on to cross out all the lines he does not like or understand or that do not interest him. This can be a quite merciless process. With *Hamlet*, it left him with about four pages of plain text that formed the basis of the script his actors were asked to work with. The rehearsal process is then focused on, as he describes it, 'inventing a structure, which makes it possible for the actors to say those lines (…) because you wouldn't understand the lines out of context' (2017). Thus, Rüping's method is very far from the more traditional way of working where the text provides both content and form, and the director and actors spend their time exploring the possibilities within the framework of the text. Instead, Rüping's method can be seen in the light of postmodern deconstruction. Chris Barker and Emma A. Jane explain: 'To deconstruct is to take apart, to undo, in order to seek out and display the assumptions of a text. (…) Deconstruction seeks to expose the blind-spots of texts' (2016: 98). This is a good description of what Rüping did in his work on *Hamlet*. Rüping deconstructed and reduced *Hamlet* to a textual basis that he utilised in the construction of his own staging. As I hope to show in this and later discussions of Rüping's *Hamlet*, one of the main achievements of the production was that it exposed the blind-spots of *Hamlet* and *Hamlet*'s position in contemporary culture.

At the beginning of the *Poetics*, Aristotle sets out to describe the differences between different modes of poetry. He explains: '[The poet may imitate] by narrating (either using a different *persona*, as in Homer's poetry, or as the same person without variation) or else with all the imitators as agents and engaged in activity' (1996: 5). What Aristotle describes here is the division between epic (diegesis) and dramatic art (mimesis). This description is interesting in light of Rüping's method as described above. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a dramatic text. Although Hamlet is by far the biggest part and the one through which most of the events in

the play are viewed, the play contains no narrating voice. On a textual level, the characters exist on their own, and the text is built up of their words and actions, without an interfering mediator. Through his method, Rüping breaks down this structure. He might not directly introduce a narrator, but the material is no longer built up of the characters' words and actions. Actually, character names and stage directions are, as mentioned, the first elements Rüping gets rid of. Thus, Rüping creates a text that is much less defined than a 'normal' dramatic text. This gives space to Rüping and his actors for taking on the narrating and directing role themselves – they are the interfering mediators. They decide what words will exist on stage and how those words will exist. In a way, this is similar to the strategies of Rice and Mørk-Eidem that I have described above, in that these strategies pick from and alter the text and therefore decide what the audience will witness. However, unlike Rice and Mørk-Eidem, Rüping does not engage in this kind of work to create a better understanding of the text or smooth out the experience for the audience, but the text (and Rüping's alterations to it) are only one element in the production. In Rüping's *Hamlet*, the actors alternated the characters between them, and there was no direct correspondence between who played a certain character and who said a certain line. Thus, new meanings were created as Shakespeare's words were recontextualised within the context of the staging. The dramatic text of the canonical author was de-dramatised and reduced to a much shorter non-dramatic form, which was then reborn in the theatre, but this time as a production by the contemporary theatre-artists. The new text that was created was not a play in a traditional sense, but functioned more in a postmodern and postdramatic manner as material for the theatrical artists in the here-and-now.

An example from the production can illustrate this point. As Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor note: 'Hamlet's soliloquies are among the best-known and indeed best-loved features of the play', and the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy is perhaps the most famous one (2006: 18).

Rüping's version of this soliloquy was radical in several ways, and I will return to an in-depth analysis of this moment in the next chapter. Here, it suffices to discuss how the soliloquy was removed from the context it is part of in Shakespeare's play and rather repurposed for this specific production. In Rüping's production, the soliloquy was not a moment of Hamlet confiding his thoughts to the audience, as the soliloquy is often interpreted. Instead, the soliloquy was moved to the end of the play where it served as the culmination of the evening, and it was spoken by all three actors simultaneously. The actors directed the soliloquy outwards towards the audience, and turned Shakespeare's text into an almost propaganda-like rally speech. The goal was no longer for the character to express his inner-life, but instead the speech was directed outwards towards the audience and presented them with a radical idea, namely that of suicidal terrorist attack. I will return to a closer description of the thematic aspects of Rüping's *Hamlet*, but here it suffices to say that Rüping saw Hamlet in light of solo terrorism, and much of the production centred around this point. Within this frame, 'To be or not to be' was no longer an expression of a man contemplating committing suicide, but instead it became an extreme defence of and appeal for the necessity of suicidal terrorist attacks. The goal of these attacks was set out with:

> to die: to sleep –
> No more, and by a sleep to say we end
> The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
> That the flesh is heir to (Shakespeare, 2016b: 8.61-64).

The sleep Hamlet sees as peaceful because it releases himself from his pains was here a suicidal sleep that would end a collective heartache and create a 'better' world. The rest of the speech became a call to carry out the 'enterprises of great pitch and moment' that fear of death normally prohibits, encouraging the audience to make the ultimate sacrifice (Shakespeare, 2016b: 8.87). The goal was of course not to persuade the audience to agree

with such radical ideas, but to show how easily a text from the canon could be used to build such a violent argument. This radically different meaning would not have been possible if Rüping had not started his process with stripping down so much of the original Shakespearean play and removing the soliloquy from its contextual position in the play. When not part of and thus trapped by the limits of the Shakespearean plot, the words could be read in a new light and weighted differently, and thus new meanings, in this case an extremely uncomfortable one, could appear for the audience attending Rüping's production.

Figure 3: Walter Hess, Katja Bürkle and Nils Kahnwald in Rüping's production of Hamlet *at the Münchner Kammerspiele. Photo: Thomas Aurin.*

Rüping's method as I have described it above, is a clear and explicit example of how a 'director claims the authorial function', as Bradby and Williams posit (1988: 1). Rüping himself actually describes the process in these exact terms when he says that the goal is to '[liberate] the text from the directing ideas of the person who wrote it' (2017). In this way, Rüping and his actors became the main decision-makers, while Shakespeare was reduced to a provider of words. The way Rüping works with the text is very subjective. As he says

himself: 'I cross out all the lines I don't like, (…) and I don't have any interest in [how] that would be understandable for another person' (2017). What is left is what interests Rüping. If someone else did it, the result would be different. However, it is important to note that although Rüping seemingly treats Shakespeare's text with irreverence, *Hamlet* the play is still very much present, and it is still in many ways the most important element in the production. Instead of staging the fictional story of *Hamlet*, Rüping comments on *Hamlet*, questions the play's status in contemporary culture and makes this questioning the main point of his production. As mentioned above, Barker and Jane argue that the point of deconstruction is often to 'display the assumptions of a text' (2016: 98). Rüping's production reveals how violent Hamlet is – both the character and the play – and by pulling 'To be or not to be' out of the plot-specific context in the play, the words lent themselves to a radically violent and destructive message. In this way, Rüping's production questions not only *Hamlet* as canonical play, but also contemporary culture's relation to violence. By pointing to the special position a violent text like *Hamlet* and the violent character Hamlet have been able to inhabit in our culture, Rüping's production displays what kind of assumptions our culture makes about a canonical text like *Hamlet*. Through this process of pointing out the violent and uncomfortable sides of a text like *Hamlet*, the production asks profound questions about our culture's attitudes towards violence and these questions are seen in relation to the development of solo terrorism. Thus, Rüping not only presents the text or his interpretation of it, but he interrogates and challenges both the text and the status the text has in our society. Different strategies of including such an interrogation of a text's canonicity explicitly in the contemporary staging is the main point of focus for the next chapter of this thesis.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed different strategies the directors I study have for engaging with the text of canonical plays in their contemporary productions. To help my discussion, I argued, following Duška Radosavljević, that it is useful to look at the relation between page and stage as one of translation from one idiom (the text) to another idiom (theatre language). Seeing the relation between text and performance as one of translation makes it possible to use Laurence Venuti's concepts of 'domestication' and 'foreignization' to analyse the way in which directors translate canonical texts for the stage and the ethical issues that follow their translation practices. The three types of strategies I have discussed form a continuum based on the degree to which they deal directly with the canonicity of the texts and invite the audience to reflect on this canonicity. On one end of the continuum, Rice and Mørk-Eidem work to erase the canonicity of the texts by attempting to present the texts as contemporary through both language and cultural references. The directors translate unfamiliar words and phrases into more contemporary ones, and they exchange obscure cultural and political references for references to contemporary life and issues. Their practice can be seen in relation to what Venuti calls 'domestication' because they attempt to make canonical plays seem domestic to contemporary culture and speak directly to a contemporary audience. I pointed out some dangers with this practice, mainly related to how hiding the problematic features of canonical texts blocks audiences from engaging with such differences; thus risking their support of dominant values and ideologies.

In opposition to strategies that smooth out audience experience, the strategies of Hill-Gibbins and Arnarsson, as I discuss them above, highlighted problematic features of the text and made such features parts of their staging. I showed how Hill-Gibbins exploited a problematic feature within the story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, namely the disturbing relationship between Oberon and Titania, as a point of departure for making discussions

around gender a central thematic feature of his production. Disturbing gender issues in Shakespeare's text was contrasted with contemporary sensibilities in ways that invited the audience to reflect on the differences between gender issues as presented in the canonical text and gender issues in contemporary life. Arnarsson, on the other hand, used problematic elements outside the content of the play, namely the over-familiarity of *Hamlet*, as a point of departure for making the relationship between canonical play and contemporary staging the main issue of his production. Here, the staging invited the audience to reflect on the relationship between text and performance itself and on the director's negotiation of this relationship. In both instances, it is possible to see the directors' strategies in light of what Venuti calls 'foreignization', since the way in which the directors translated the text for the stage did not have accessibility or comprehensiveness as the main goal, but rather sought to point out and exploit problematic and foreign features in the source texts, and to invite the audience to participate in a reflection on such problematic features and how they could or should be dealt with today.

Finally, Rüping's strategy, which I discussed in the third section of the chapter, involved a step away from the source text of *Hamlet*. Deconstructing the text and only keeping certain parts of it, allowed Rüping to create a staging that was completely dependent on *Hamlet*, but which was simultaneously not a production of *Hamlet* in a traditional sense. Rather than just a *production* of the text, Rüping's staging was a *commentary* on the text, where Rüping and the actors constantly challenged the texts and the values it contains. Rüping's production of *Hamlet* can still be seen in the light of translation, but because the staging was so far removed from the text, the production highlighted the interpretive quality of translation that Venuti also points to. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Venuti argues that a translation is only 'one interpretive possibility among others' (2013: 4). In his production of *Hamlet*, Rüping made no secret of how his production was only one

among several possible interpretations of or ways of engaging with the play. Actually, the relationship between the play *Hamlet* and its interpretations in contemporary culture was the main focus point of the production. Rüping's production could be seen as a commentary on *Hamlet*, and the audience was invited to participate in a reflection on the play and the claims that were made about the play in the production.

In chapter one, I introduced Chantal Mouffe's arguments around an agonistic view of art, and I argued that such a view of art is a useful point of departure for exploring how canonical texts are reproduced on the contemporary stage. To Mouffe, critical art is 'constituted by a manifold of artistic practices bringing to the fore the existence of alternatives to the current post-political order' (2013: 92-93). Considering the strategies discussed in this chapter, it seems that those of Hill-Gibbins, Arnarsson and Rüping are more suited to Mouffe's vision than the more 'domesticating' strategies of Rice and Mørk-Eidem. As I have pointed out above the more 'domesticating' strategies of the two latter directors risk blocking the audience from participating in reflections on and dialogues about the canonical texts and the values they express, because the texts are presented as contemporary, and features that might seem different or problematic to modern sensibilities are smoothed over. Mouffe describes the differences of a traditional view of the public space created by art and her agonistic view in the following way:

> According to the accepted view, the public space is the terrain where one aims at creating consensus. For the agonistic approach, on the contrary, the public space is where conflicting points of view are confronted without any possibility of a final reconciliation (2013: 92).

What is central to Mouffe's agonistic view of art, then, is that art facilitates dialogue, or at least the confrontation of conflicting points of view. By smoothing out the differences between the canonical texts and contemporary sensibilities, the directors fail in producing an

agonistic public space as Mouffe envisages it, because they also block any opportunity for the audience to see alternatives to the values presented in the canonical text and in the production. Even if they are changed and translated, the canonical texts are presented as self-evident in the productions, because the work of negotiating the relationship between the canonical text and the contemporary situation is done by the directors before presentation to the audience. The audience are largely excluded from the negotiation between past and present in these productions.

Such an exclusion from possible dialogue and reflection is contrasted by the strategies of Hill-Gibbins, Arnarsson and Rüping as I have presented them above, because these strategies in different ways and to different extents engage in a dialogue with the canonical text directly on stage. Unlike the more 'domesticating' strategies, these directors find problematic features of canonical plays and present, to varying degrees, their own negotiation of such features explicitly on stage. Thus, these directors do not hide the problematic features of canonical plays for their audience, and they invite the audience to partake in a reflection on the problematic features and possible ways to deal with or counter them. Such strategies then, are closer to how Mouffe envisages critical art because rather than smoothing over confrontational views, they explicitly present and explore them, and through this they also provide alternatives to the ideologies that are expressed in the canonical texts and the value of the canon itself. In addition, the audience is invited to adapt a similarly critical view of the canonical text, but also indirectly of the production and how it deals with the text. Thus, the public space that is created is not one that encourages consensus, but one that encourages, to varying degrees, attitudes of critical reflection.

I will return to a discussion of how the directors' strategies can become the basis for critical art as Mouffe envisages it in chapter six. There I will discuss both how the directors challenge the ideologies and values of the canon, and whether they, through their productions,

create agonistic public spaces. However, this chapter shows that there are certain strategies present in some of the directors' work for translating canonical texts to contemporary theatrical productions that interrogate and challenge canonicity and the values and ideologies presented by the canon that open the possibilities for developing critical art in Mouffe's sense. Discussion on strategies of conscious interrogation of the canon follows in the next chapter of this thesis. There, I change my focus from how directors work with texts, to study explicit moments in productions where directors focus on, interrogate and challenge canonicity.

Chapter 4: Dealing with canonicity

In chapter two, I discussed which reasons the directors themselves give for producing canonical plays. I demonstrated how the directors often subscribe to an old-fashioned view of the canon as of particularly 'high quality', and I discussed the problematic sides of this view. However, I also demonstrated how the directors gave a different reason for producing canonical plays: namely the opportunities canonical status gives for playing with, interrogating and challenging certain plays, the audience expectation of the plays and the hegemonic institution of the canon. The ways in which directors engage with the canonical status of canonical plays on stage in their productions are the main topic of this chapter. I now shift my focus from the working methods of the directors to their actual productions; focusing specifically on the ways in which the directors interrogate the canonical status of plays and challenge audience expectations. In relation to canonical plays, audiences can have expectations of the playtexts themselves, but audience expectation can of course also be related to other elements of performance such as casting choices or the place of performance. The discussion of different productions in this chapter is therefore divided into three parts, where the first is concerned with the canonicity of playtexts, the second is concerned with characters and casting, and the third is concerned with the location of the performance. The main argument of the chapter is that explicitly playing with canonicity and audience expectations are important strategies the directors use for forming a connection between plays of the past and theatrical situations of the present. I demonstrate how meaning is created in productions by these directors through continuously referring to and playing with what it means to reproduce the canon in contemporary theatre. Through this, I also begin to discuss what kinds of counter-hegemonic potential exists in such workings with and challenging of canonicity, a discussion I continue in chapter six. However, before I begin my analyses of productions, I will introduce a term that is helpful in describing how directors deal with

canonical status and audience expectation, and therefore instrumental to my analysis: 'points of expectation'.

4.1 Points of expectation

In canonical plays, there are certain moments, images or pieces of text that are more well-known to the audience than others, and these often carry with them specific expectations in the audience. I have chosen to call such moments 'points of expectation'. Points of expectation are related to Marvin Carslon's concept of the stage as haunted, which I have discussed in previous chapters. Carlson suggests that theatre 'is the repository of cultural memory' and he argues that '[t]he present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations' (2001: 2). According to Carlson, an audience member always experiences a performance in relation to previous experiences and cultural knowledge. In the case of theatrical performances of canonical texts, such previous experiences often include knowledge and expectations of the text in question. I argue that points of expectation are heightened moments of a haunted stage, moments that are perceived to be well-known and therefore present in audiences' memories in ways that make virtually the whole experience of watching a performance coloured by the expectations around them in the audience and the solutions invented for them on stage. Examples of points of expectation in plays by the playwrights I discuss are Hamlet's 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy, Nora slamming the door behind her at the end of *A Doll's House* (1879), and the titular character pulling her cart in *Mother Courage and her Children* (1938).

It is important to note that points of expectations are not necessarily only related to moments in the plays themselves. Points of expectations can also relate to the performance conditions of a particular production. A famous actor will, for example, often be a point of expectation for a production, because audience expectations can be concerned with watching

a celebrity and with how that celebrity tackles the character in question. Similarly, the location of a production can become a point of expectation through the memories of past performances or claims of a specific relationship between the location and the plays performed. Actually, depending on the specific context of a theatrical production, more or less any element of the production can become a point of expectation. A similar point has been made by Erika Fischer-Lichte, who notes:

> The producers' and the audiences' knowledge of different theatre forms falls under the category of cultural and theatrical conditions. These include performance traditions and conventions, acting styles, the actors of the company and their repertoire of roles, texts and their performance history, and many other aspects (2008: 109).

Fischer-Lichte counts the audience's pre-knowledge as part of the cultural and theatrical conditions of a performance. Taking her argument into account, anything related to a production that falls into this pre-knowledge can become a point of expectation, depending on what feature is most important to the audience's pre-understanding of a particular production. It is also important to note that an audience member's relation to points of expectation to a large extent is individual. Susan Bennett argues that '[a]n audience's idea of the event will vary according to their contact with theatre and other art forms, as well as according to their position in the socio-cultural system' (1997: 100). Thus, while points of expectation are often so well known that many audience members will have knowledge of and specific expectations of them, this knowledge and these expectations will vary from individual to individual. Many audience members will have a relation to the words 'To be or not to be – that is the question', but what kind of relation this is will vary depending on their previous experiences.

In this chapter, I will discuss how points of expectation become important tools for the directors I study when they seek to play with and challenge both a play's canonical status and audience expectation. Adaptation scholar Linda Hutcheon argues that an audience's memory

and previous experience is not only inevitable, but necessary for the creation of meaning in artworks based on other artworks. She argues that '[a]s audience members, we need memory in order to experience difference as well as similarity' (2006: 22). For Hutcheon, meaning in adaptation is created in the rupture between similarity and difference and the audience's perception of this rupture. The same can be said for the ways in which the directors I study engage with canonical texts. The directors use points of expectation both to engage with audience expectation and to break such expectation and thereby surprise, jolt and challenge their audiences. Often, the process of engaging and breaking with audience expectation is explicitly put on stage. Thus, the directors exploit the rupture between similarity and difference that Hutcheon describes by staging both what they believe the audience know and challenges to this pre-knowledge in their productions. For several of these directors, incorporating a challenging attitude towards audience expectation, and particularly to specific points of expectation in the theatrical events, becomes an important strategy for adapting canonical texts to the contemporary theatrical situation.

Explicitly playing with and challenging a source text in production is not necessarily unusual in and of itself. Patrice Pavis argues: 'To put the play onstage is (…) to begin to deconstruct its traditional image, while already reconstructing a possible reading' (2013: 162). According to Pavis, when a play is put on stage, a process of de- and re-constructing what that play means and has meant before begins. Several scholars who work on the process of adaptation mention conscious breaks with tradition as a major strategy. Hutcheon notes that 'there are manifestly many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation', one of which is 'to call [the adapted text] into question' (2006: 7). Similarly, Julie Sanders argues that '[a]daptation is frequently involved in offering commentary on a sourcetext' (2006: 19). In a context more specifically related to my topic, Peter Boenisch notes that in directors' theatre, 'especially within the established text-theatre institutions of the European continent,

dramaturgic approaches have a long tradition of playfully challenging even canonical play-texts' (2010: 163-164). Thus, adapting a text through playing with, commenting on and even critiquing that text is not a new strategy either generally or in the theatre.

However, I will argue that the directors I discuss go one step further than just challenging the playtexts as such, namely by also playing with and challenging these plays' canonical status. Often the directors do not only discuss the plays in their productions, but also what it means to reproduce these plays in contemporary theatre. I will use the concept of 'points of expectation' to explore how directors explicitly challenge canonical status and audience expectation in their stagings, and I will give examples of how directors use points of expectation as an integral part of their productions and how such points become an important strategy for the directors in making an impact with their productions. I argue that challenging audience expectation can be seen as an opportunity to make the audience see the familiar in a new light and thus to re-evaluate their pre-conceived ideas both about the canonical text, the performance and the theatrical situation. As mentioned, my discussion is divided into three parts: points of expectation within and around the script of canonical plays and how this script is delivered and presented in the theatre, points of expectation regarding characters and casting, and points of expectation in relation to the location of a performance.

4.2 Points of expectation and text

The most obvious source of points of expectation is the actual text of canonical plays. Because they are continuously read and performed, many canonical plays contain textual passages that have become well known outside the context of the play they are part of. For example, the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy or certain lines by Ibsen (for example this from *The Wild Duck*: 'Deprive the average human being of his life-lie, and you rob him of his happiness' (Ibsen, 2000: 203)) have become famous as pieces of text. It is the words

themselves that constitute the point of expectation. There is a difference here between plays read or performed in their original language and plays read or performed in translation. It is more likely, though not always the case, that a play in its original language will contain more textual points of expectation than a play in translation. For example, several of the famous Ibsen plays have lines that are familiar in Norwegian, both as lines by Ibsen and because they have entered everyday speech. Many of these lines will not necessary be familiar when the plays are read or performed in translation. However, certain lines and textual moments, perhaps particularly by Shakespeare, have become so famous that they must be regarded as points of expectation also in translation. For example, Hamlet's 'To be or not to be', is almost equally recognisable in Norwegian ('Å være eller ikke være') or in German ('Zu sein oder nicht zu sein') as in the original English. Textual points of expectation work not only on the level of the play, but also as phrases or proverbs that stand alone outside the context of the play. As such, they qualify as what Tom Stern calls 'words of wisdom', which I also referred to in chapter three. They are 'phrases that get quoted independently of their dramatic context' (2014: 51). They exist on two levels, both as part of the play they occur in, and as proverbs or sayings independent of their dramatic context.

In addition to such purely textual or linguistic functions, points of expectation in dramatic texts are also often coloured by their performance history. Many points of expectation will be associated with one or more iconic theatrical (or filmic) performance. Such associations can happen both on a collective level where iconic interpretations have entered theatre history and thus are part of cultural memory, or on an individual level related to specific audience members' previous experiences in the theatre. An example of the collective type is Helene Weigel's famous 'silent scream' in the Berliner Ensemble's production of *Mother Courage*, which has become one of the most-cited and well-remembered theatrical moments in the 20th century. Even if not everyone in the audience are

familiar with Weigel's interpretation, it is part of the cultural consciousness within which performances of *Mother Courage* work. Individual associations to points of expectation happen when audience members watch a performance of a play they have watched before. Their experience, for example of the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy in *Hamlet*, is coloured by previous productions they have seen of *Hamlet* and of other occasions where they have heard those famous words. In these ways, points of expectation in plays work both as iconic pieces of texts and as reminders of iconic performance choices.

In the following, I will explore how directors work consciously with textual points of expectation in their productions. I argue that the directors I discuss consciously and explicitly make the fame of, and cultural consciousness around, points of expectation part of their mise en scène, and they often challenge traditional versions of and expectations of such moments directly. I discuss three examples in this section: Christopher Rüping's production of *Hamlet*, Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson's production *Enemy of the Duck*, and Alexander Mørk-Eidem's production of *Peer Gynt*.

4.2.1 The power of a point of expectation – Re-interpreting 'To be or not to be' in Christopher Rüping's *Hamlet*

To exemplify how a production can tackle and challenge a single point of expectation, I will focus on the interpretation of the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy in Christopher Rüping's production of *Hamlet*. 'To be or not to be' will almost always be a point of expectation in a production of *Hamlet* because it is possibly the most famous line in any play and because there are so many iconic performances of the soliloquy. In Rüping's interpretation, the special canonical status of 'To be or not to be' was, as I will argue below, actually the point of departure for how the soliloquy was staged. As I have described in chapter three, Rüping's production was performed by only three actors, and Hamlet was presented in a very

unsympathetic way, as a radical political activist or soon-to-be solo terrorist. The 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy was removed from its usual position in the play and 'saved' for the very end of the performance. When it was finally time to perform it, the three actors first left the stage leaving the impression that none of them wanted to perform the famous words. When they returned, the soliloquy was presented as a piece of terrorist propaganda, an interpretation that runs counter to most traditional readings.

The first untraditional element in the performance of the speech was that the three actors read different German translations on top of each other. In chapter three, I discussed how Laurence Venuti sees translation as always coloured by 'values, beliefs, and representations that pre-exist in the translating language and culture' (2008: 14). As such, translation can never achieve one-to-one equivalence, but is always an act of interpretation. This understanding of translation as always unstable was directly staged in Rüping's version of 'To be or not to be', when the three actors performed three different translations of the soliloquy. Instead of serving (or pretending to serve) a stable Shakespearean original, the performance gave the audience textual ambivalence and highlighted the instability of both original and translated source by making them listen to different versions at the same time. The staging highlighted how not even a famous text like 'To be or not to be' can be viewed as a stable source with a clear meaning. Instead, the staging pointed out how a rendition of a text is always one interpretation among many. Where 'To be or not to be' is often a moment for one single actor and one single text, in this version, singularity was ruled out as there were multiple texts, actors and interpretations.

Even if the three translations highlighted the instability of meaning, the three choices carried specific meaning in the production. The three translations were chosen by the three actors, and also, according to Rüping, reflected three different traditions of acting that they brought to the stage. The nearly eighty-year-old Walter Hess spoke the traditional German

translation compiled in the nineteenth century by August Wilhelm Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck, while Katja Bürgle and Nils Kahnwald chose newer translations by Heiner Müller (1977) and Jürgen Gosh (2001). Rüping argued that the choices of translations reflected the actors' personalities: 'Because if Walter Hess is talking (…) about *Hamlet*, it's much more in a Schlegel-Tieck-way, but with Katja it's much more a Heiner Müller-kind-of-way, and Nils is much more a contemporary Jürgen Gosch-way' (2017). According to Rüping the three actors chose the translation that was closest to their way of speaking, thinking and acting. Performing the soliloquy was no longer about projecting Shakespeare's words and meanings, but rather an emphasis was put on the language of the actors. Thus, not only audience expectations but the actors' expectations and struggles were directly staged. Not only the text, but the actors' work on the text from the rehearsal room – including how they had worked to find a suitable translation of the English source – became explicitly part of the final production. Through the different translations and the actors' engagement, the production challenged the point of expectation of the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy by constantly pointing out how it is not a fixed text with fixed meanings.

Also through the actual staging, Rüping's version of 'To be or not to be' challenged audience expectations. The actors' rendition was quite different from traditional interpretations of the speech. Vincent F. Petronella summarises the traditional interpretations of 'To be or not to be' in the following way:

> Three basic approaches to the "To be or not to be" soliloquy prevail in commentary on Hamlet: one of these explains the speech as a consideration of either acting or not acting against King Claudius; the second reads the speech as a contemplation of suicide; and the third is some kind of compromise between – or fusion of – the first two (1974: 72).

In Rüping's production, none of these interpretations prevailed. Hamlet did not contemplate his own condition, his own actions or the possibility of his own suicide. Rather, the soliloquy, here placed towards the end as the culmination of the evening, became a violent request for the ultimate sacrifice in the mind of a radical activist or terrorist. Instead of directing the soliloquy inwards as a reflection on themselves, the three actors directed it towards the audience, encouraging them to act. The visual effects were inspired by propaganda videos used by terror organisations like ISIS or solo-terrorists like the Norwegian mass-murderer Anders Behring Breivik (in the interview, Rüping commented that Breivik's manifesto had been used in the preparations for the production): The speech was accompanied by the use of smoke machines, torches and epic music, and the aesthetics were reminiscent of computer games and other imagery that Breivik describes in his manifesto. The line 'Thus conscience does make cowards of us all' gained special meaning in this interpretation, as Hamlet scorned the world and the audience for not fighting for what he believed in (Shakespeare, 2016: 8.84). The speech was no longer a reflection on the self and the inability to act but had instead turned into the opposite: an active, direct propaganda speech that called the audience to action. In his staging then, Rüping highlighted the textual ambiguity of the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy, and he emphasised this ambiguity by creating an interpretation that was uncomfortable and far removed from traditional views of the speech.

I would argue that Rüping achieved three goals through his staging of the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy. First, he let the audience know immediately that he was aware of their expectations around the famous speech, and by having the actors leave the stage, he clearly signalled that he would challenge such expectations. Instead of just being part of the context of the play/performance, the soliloquy was actually singled out as an important point of expectation and made the actual dramatic and visual climax of the production. As I mentioned in chapter three, Tom Stern argues that 'words of wisdom', like the 'To be or not to be'-

soliloquy, 'are not best understood as isolated statements by the playwright', but should rather be understood in the context of the action they are part of (2014: 51). Rüping's version of 'To be or not to be' did exactly the opposite, as the famous 'words of wisdom' were actively removed from their position in the plot of *Hamlet*, and rather singled out, moved to the most climactic moment in the production and announced as a famous speech. The soliloquy was exploited for its status as a famous piece of text.

Second, Rüping highlighted how a famous speech like 'To be or not to be' cannot be pinned down to a single meaning, even if audiences might think that they know such speeches very well. Rüping proved this point by using three different translations and by giving the audience a radically new reading of the speech and the play. Bert O. States coins the term 'preconventional shock' in order to describe revolutionary staging elements in the theatre. According to him, a 'preconventional shock' is:

> the alteration of the "ceremony" by the intrusion of something with little or no aesthetic history (…) [It is] not shock as outrage but shock in the sense that birth, or exposure, or discovery are shocking; shock not only for the audience but for the medium itself which has, as it were, stumbled onto something with an unknown potential (1985: 42).

States uses the term 'preconventional shock' to describe revolutions in theatrical, and particularly staging, conventions, but I would argue that the term is useful for describing radical takes on individual canonical points of expectation as well, like the example of Rüping's version of 'To be or not to be'. Through his staging, Rüping 'stumbled onto' a reading of *Hamlet*, which has not been prevalent in previous stagings of or commentary on the play, but which nevertheless is a potential within the text itself. The exploration of the mind of a solo terrorist became stronger and almost frightening by being presented through a play and a speech that is usually seen as an important text in the canon. It was as if *Hamlet*

itself had lost its secure place as a canonical play of moral value, because it seemingly contained these words that could so easily be used as propaganda for terrorist actions.

Seeing Rüping's version of 'To be or not to be' as what States call a 'preconventional shock' also leads to a third point. Rüping gave the audience a different interpretation of the well-known speech, but importantly he did not change the words (except for the fact that he was working in translation). It follows that this more uncomfortable interpretation is a potential in the text itself, a potential that, in State's words, Rüping's staging had 'stumbled onto'. State's concept of 'preconventional shock' marks the establishing of new staging conventions in the theatre, because such new conventions are discovered and seen to have potential for future stagings. Similarly, Rüping's version of *Hamlet* might have consequences for future readings and stagings of *Hamlet* as well, or at least his version might be seen as a challenge to the play, how it is viewed as part of the canon, and thereby also as a challenge to the Western canon in general. In a traditional view, Hamlet is seen as a hero, or at least an anti-hero, and some have even called him the first literary portrayal of a modern human being with a subjective consciousness. Ronald Knowles sums up this view: 'In the study of the development of Western culture the question of subjectivity is a much debated issue which is often directed to the Renaissance in general, and to Hamlet in particular' (1999: 1046). Harold Bloom is a representative of this view when he argues that Shakespeare was the first writer to portray human personality in a modern sense: 'Personality, in our sense, is a Shakespearean invention, and is not only Shakespeare's greatest originality but also the authentic cause of his perpetual pervasiveness' (1999: 4). According to him, Hamlet and Falstaff are the two characters that best represent this invention of human personality: 'Between them, they occupy the center of Shakespeare's invention of the human' (1999: 403). Bloom also characterises Hamlet as 'the leading Western representation of an intellectual' (1999: 383). Such views of Hamlet as the ultimate portrayal of human personality and intellect sits

uncomfortably with the terrorist we encounter in Rüping's production, but importantly, both interpretations have Shakespeare's text as their point of departure. In his production, Rüping pointed out that Hamlet is responsible for the death of many people, including the people closest to him. More importantly, however, Hamlet's language can, as I have discussed above, rather be easily turned around to present views that seem dangerous and uncomfortable. Thus, Rüping questioned the kind of heroes our culture chooses and what kinds of values are behind these choices. By making connections between the terrorist propaganda of ISIS and Breivik and one of the most celebrated and canonical plays in Western culture, Rüping invited the audience to participate in a reflection on how contemporary culture relates to violence and terrorism. Rüping does not provide any clear-cut answers to how the connection between violence/terrorism and *Hamlet* is to be understood, but his staging encouraged the audience to focus on this question. It is in this sense that his version of 'To be or not to be' can be seen as a preconventional shock: Rüping revealed to the audience a new and uncomfortable meaning in the text and invited them to reflect on what this new meaning might imply for their future relationship to that text, and more importantly for their relationship with canonical texts in general. Rüping's production revealed a potential in *Hamlet* that invited the audience to reflect on and perhaps even alter how they view the canon and its values and conventions.

Through his staging, then, Rüping both engaged with and challenged the point of expectation of the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy. He used the canonicity of this piece of text to create new meanings in the theatrical rendition of it, and these new meanings were directly tied to the canonicity of the text itself. The traditional versions and interpretations of the soliloquy are essential for Rüping's counter-traditional reading to achieve the impact it does. The interpretation Rüping made gained its power because of the status of the speech – twisting Shakespeare's words into terrorist propaganda was surprising and powerful because the traditional interpretations of the speech are so completely different. Thus, it was the

canonical status of the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy that allowed Rüping to create his staging.

4.2.2 Points of expectations as dramaturgical key to Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson's *Enemy of the Duck*

My analysis of the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy in Rüping's *Hamlet* demonstrated the power that lies in reworking the traditions and challenging audience expectations in relation to one point of expectation. Sometimes, such play with tradition and expectations can become the main dramaturgical strategy for a whole production. This was to a large extent the case with Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson's production *Enemy of the Duck*. This production was a compilation of two of Ibsen's most canonical plays: *An Enemy of the People* and *The Wild Duck*, and it was the opening production of the International Ibsen Festival at the National Theatre in Oslo in 2016. Both the two plays, the location and the event can be seen as part of a canonical Ibsen legacy, which for Arnarsson opened possibilities for playing with tradition and expectation. The production was filled with unexpected nods to and interpretations of elements in both plays and in the cultural consciousness surrounding Ibsen's realist plays, and I will discuss several of these below. Through such nods and interpretations, one can argue that instead of giving a new interpretation or version of the plays as such, playing with expectations and traditions itself became the main theme of *Enemy of the Duck*, a theme that, as I will argue below, also took on political and social dimensions.

One of the most renowned elements of Ibsen's realist plays is the detailed descriptions of the plays' settings. Ibsen's realist plays usually take place in some form of bourgeois living room that always is extensively described in the stage directions. *An Enemy of the People* and *The Wild Duck* are no exceptions. This, for example, is an extract of the descriptions of the Ekdal home in *The Wild Duck*:

> HJALMAR EKDAL's studio. It is a quite large room, and is evidently an attic. To the right is a sloping ceiling containing large panes of glass, which are half-covered by a blue curtain. (…) The studio is humbly but comfortably furnished. Between the doors on the right, a little away from the wall, stands a sofa, with a table and some chairs. In the corner by the stove is an old armchair (Ibsen, 2000: 135).

Ibsen's stage directions in the realist plays are always detailed like this, and many of the rooms described in different plays share the overall layout and main elements. In *Enemy of the Duck*, Arnarsson and the designer, Vytautas Narbutas, utilised the content and canonicity of Ibsen's stage directions in their set. The set for the production shared many characteristics with Ibsen's living rooms. It had three walls (the audience as fourth wall being in place) with several doors leading into the main playing space. Around the walls there was furniture, including a piano and a dressing table with a mirror. In the room itself, there were an old-fashioned chaise longue and similar chairs. In addition, there was a spiral staircase leading up to an upper level built in with glass walls as described in the stage direction from *The Wild Duck* above. Throughout, this upper area served as the attic in *The Wild Duck* where the Ekdal family keep their animals. Thus, in a similar way to how the production was a mash-up of two iconic Ibsen-plays, the set was not necessarily one specific Ibsen living room, but rather a mash-up of several living rooms from several plays. The audience was presented with the ultimate compilation of Ibsen living rooms.

However, one feature of Arnarsson and Narbutas' design was particularly striking and set up a special relationship between this staging and the Ibsen tradition: their set looked very old. The furniture was not only old-fashioned, but it looked worn down, dusty and damaged. For instance, parts of the upstairs glass wall were broken, the paint had in many places come off the walls, and several of the picture frames on the wall had the actual pictures missing. The floor was covered in dust and moss. It looked as if, instead of creating a new set, the

production reused the sets from Ibsen productions staged long ago that had been in storage until now. This was of course not the case; the set was new and expensive, as Mads Ousdal, one of the actors, made clear from the stage at one point. Nevertheless, the 'old and worn'-looking set created an explicit relation between Arnarsson's production and the legacy of Ibsen both generally and at the National Theatre. The set suggested that the production was part of this legacy, and defined the production as the latest in a tradition of Ibsen productions at the National Theatre.

Figure 4: Vytautas Narbutas' set for Arnarsson's production Enemy of the Duck *at Nationaltheatret, Oslo. Foto: Øyvind Eide.*

The connection between the production's set and the tradition of Ibsen sets opened up a conversation about tradition in the production, something Arnarsson followed up by not only reproducing an Ibsen living room set, but also continuously challenging this type of set, the conventions normally related to such sets, and the traditions such sets are normally seen as part of throughout the production. For example, at several moments the fourth wall was broken and the performance moved into the auditorium. An example was during the public

meeting (in act four of *Enemy of the People*) when Peter Stockmann interrupted his brother Thomas from the circle of the auditorium and proceeded to enter the stage. He climbed down a ladder, walked through the stalls, and chatted to members of the audience. The two speeches that followed, by Peter and Thomas, were both directed to the audience. Thus, the action of the performance was not contained within the walls of the Ibsen living room. Towards the end of the evening, the performance left the plot of the two Ibsen plays behind and became increasingly chaotic. As part of this chaos, the set was physically destroyed, as the back wall got torn down leaving a big hole as if after an explosion or half-way through a demolition. Thus, Ibsen's living room was demolished both physically and in relation to traditional staging conventions, and the demolition happened explicitly as part of the staging. Arnarsson is of course not the first director to break with the Ibsen living room trope in a production of Ibsen's plays, even at the National Theatre in Oslo. Many Ibsen productions have been created in spaces that do not resemble Ibsen's descriptions. However, Arnarsson made the break from the tradition much more explicit by first putting Ibsen's descriptions on stage, and then concretely breaking them down both in terms of acting style and in terms of physical deconstruction. His staging was not just a break with tradition, but a conversation with tradition that acted out the relationship between old forms and new inventions, between the traditions of staging Ibsen and this specific production.

The set was not the only way in which *Enemy of the Duck* challenged and questioned traditions and expectations regarding Ibsen's realist plays. Another good example of how the production acknowledged and worked with points of expectation is Arnarsson's interpretation of the aforementioned public meeting in *An Enemy of the People*. This scene, which constitutes the entire fourth act of Ibsen's play, is one of the most central in *An Enemy of the People* and one of the most memorable. It is also noticeable in relation to other Ibsen plays because it is the most public scene in any of Ibsen's realist works and the only one that

features a group of unnamed people in a mass scene. The scene of the public meeting has been the object of creative solutions in several contemporary productions, most notably in Thomas Ostermeier's version (2012), which toured worldwide. Ostermeier turned Ibsen's fictional public meeting into an actual public political debate where microphones were passed around and the audience was encouraged to discuss the action on stage and the ways they saw it relating to their own lives. This discussion was of course different every night. When I saw the production in London, many spectators engaged in a civil but lively discussion. In contrast, actor Ingo Hülsmann described the public meeting in Buenos Aires as '25 minutes of class struggle live, and proper riot in the house' (Boenisch and Ostermeier, 2016: 125). Thus, in Ostermeier's production of *An Enemy of the People*, the public meeting was used to engage the audience directly in a contemporary political debate.

Utilising the scene of the public meeting to draw the audience closer into the theatrical situation was also the main strategy for Arnarsson, but where Ostermeier attempted to create real political debates through theatre, Arnarsson used the public meeting to discuss whether creating political change through theatre and art is actually possible. This question was at the heart of the partly improvised speech Thomas Stockmann, played by Mads Ousdal, made to the audience during the scene of the public meeting. Ousdal/Stockmann claimed that he had prepared a political speech about the need for radical change in society, but that he would not actually perform it because he, according to himself, had lost faith in theatre and its ability to properly critique society. Instead of the 'prepared' speech, Ousdal/Stockmann ventured into a long, partly improvised rant. He explained how he had desperately wanted to be an actor since he, as a child, had gone to the theatre with his father (Sverre Anker Ousdal, who is also a famous Norwegian actor). But he went on to explain that he had now lost faith, that attempting to achieve change through theatre seemed meaningless in the midst of all the frightening things happening in 'the real world', such as the dangers of climate change and

the rise of populist right-wing parties in Europe. Ousdal/Stockmann complained about what he saw as the powerlessness of theatre when facing such issues. In a way, then, this moment can be seen as an explicit expression of the issue I have described as the starting point for Mouffe's reflections on art, namely how art seems to be intrinsically linked to the capitalist structures of contemporary Western society and how art therefore seems unable to critique society in an intrinsic way. In my interview with him, Arnarsson explained that the point of this speech was exactly this: to ask 'very reflective questions on the meaning of theatre in the modern world, which I think is a very fair question to ask' (2017). As I will elaborate in the next paragraphs, asking this question within the frames of a play and a scene that is often seen as an example of theatre and playwrighting engaging with political debates constitutes a clear challenge to audience expectation. Ironically, as I will discuss, asking questions about the political power of theatre in these ways actually made it possible for Arnarsson to invite the audience to participate in political reflection on their own spectatorship.

When comparing Ibsen, Ostermeier and Arnarsson, one can in a way distinguish three different levels of political debate through the public meeting in *An Enemy of the People*. In Ibsen's text, the public meeting is, in its content, concerned with problems that exist within the fictional world. These problems are important for the world outside the theatre only indirectly. The discussion concerning clean water is a relevant topic in society as such, but the actual case Ibsen presents, of a tannery contaminating the water in a town dependent on water for the local spa, is firmly placed in a fictional world. Perhaps more important in Ibsen's play is the conflict between the individual and society. This is portrayed directly in the play, but the fictional world of the play might also be seen as a reflection of how we think about democracy and political institutions in 'the real world'. Ostermeier's production, on the other hand, broke the fictional world and attempted to connect the content of the public meeting with contemporary issues. The debate in the theatre had as its main focus not only the

situation in the fictional world of the play, but also the social issues raised by the members of the audience. The parallels between Ibsen's text and contemporary conditions was not suggested, but actively and explicitly discussed in the debate. As Hülsmann's comment about Buenos Aires suggests, the relations between the play and contemporary situation was at times extremely engaging for the audience who took part in an actual political exchange.

Finally, like Ostermeier's production, *Enemy of the Duck* brought the content of the public meeting into the contemporary, but the concern was less about political and social questions than about the actual theatrical-public situation in the here and now of the staging. Instead of concerning itself with political discussions, the production questioned whether there is ever any utility in making theatre that engages in political and social issues. This questioning also extends to Ibsen's canonicity, as Ibsen, among other characteristics, has become famous as a playwright who put social and political questions on stage[9]. To question the value of a politically conscious theatre within an Ibsen-production, like Arnarsson did in *Enemy of the Duck*, can be seen as an attack on the legacy of Ibsen and his status as canonical writer. In addition, Arnarsson also challenged the setting for the production, namely the Ibsen festival. This festival brings together productions from all over the world to show a diversity of Ibsen interpretations. The audience gathers to see what kind of meaning, value and legacy Ibsen's plays still acquire in the contemporary world. Arnarsson, however, seemingly questioned the notion that Ibsen, and even theatre, can have a political impact or meaning in the contemporary. By questioning the value of Ibsen, Arnarsson was not only challenging the plays but also the festival and the audience who participated in a celebration of these plays. Through constantly challenging points of expectation, even to the extent of questioning the value of the performance itself, Arnarsson's production created a model space where the

[9] See, for example, Bjørn Hemmer who argues that Ibsen's realist dramas always present the relationship between individuals and society (Hemmer, 2003: 35).

audience is encouraged to participate in a reflection on their own spectatorship, on their relation to Ibsen and the canon, on their participation in celebrating Ibsen at the Ibsen Festival, and ultimately on the political implications of other parts of their lives as well. As such, the performance can perhaps be seen as beginning to constitute an agonistic public space in the sense Mouffe discusses. I will return to a more thorough discussion of how theatrical production of canonical texts, including *Enemy of the Duck*, invite and facilitate political reflection and relate to Mouffe's theories in chapter six.

4.2.3 One specific point of expectation as dramaturgical key for the whole performance in Alexander Mørk-Eidem's *Peer Gynt*

In *Enemy of the Duck*, Arnarsson made a challenging attitude towards points of expectation a running theme throughout the production, but mostly each point of expectation, such as Ibsen's characteristic set descriptions or the scene of the public meeting in act four, was dealt with separately and in different ways. In his production of *Peer* Gynt, Alexander Mørk-Eidem used a slightly different strategy where one specific well known point of expectation became the starting point and dramaturgical key for the whole production. *Peer Gynt* is one of Ibsen's most famous plays and contains many points of expectation, particularly in a Norwegian context where the play is very much part of national identity. One iconic scene in the play is the beginning of the fourth act, when Peer, rich after years of shady business ventures, sits around a table with four foreign gentlemen. Importantly, the iconic status of this scene is related less to what Peer and the gentlemen talk about rather than the actual set-up of the scene (the table with Peer in the middle and two gentlemen on each side). This is one of the most famous images from *Peer Gynt*.

For Alexander Mørk-Eidem, this image became the most important starting point for his production, which he set in Norway's most famous contemporary talk show, *Skavlan*. The

set-up of *Skavlan*, which aired on the Norwegian National Broadcasting on Friday nights in Norway from 1998 up until 2018 (when it moved to a competing channel) and was extremely popular, was identical to the scene in the fourth act of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. The host, Fredrik Skavlan, sat in a chair in the middle with two guests on each side. Thus, the talk show is a pointed parallel to the play, and Mørk-Eidem used the talk show as the dramaturgical frame for the production. The talk show was unmistakably present from the first moments of Mørk-Eidem's staging, as the set – an accurate replica of the talk show studio – was fully visible when the audience entered and actors told the audience how to behave as if they were preparing for the shooting of the show. The production revolved around Peer's appearance as a guest on the talk show, and the entire narrative was told within this frame.

Figure 5: Finn Schau (The Mountain King/Olav Thon), Mattis Herman Nyquist (Talk Show Host) and Eindride Eidsvold (Peer) in Mørk-Eidem's production of Peer Gynt *at Nationaltheatret, Oslo. Photo: Gisle Bjørnebye.*

The talk show frame gave Mørk-Eidem an opportunity to connect the play with a contemporary context. In the interview I carried out with him, Mørk-Eidem explained his choice of using the talk show as frame in the following way:

> I wanted it to be something typically Norwegian. I wanted it to be about Norway without having too much national costumes or turning it into an idea of national romanticism. It should be "a new Norway". And then I thought about *Skavlan*, which is one of the few things that everyone knows. Everyone gathers around. It's a kind of campfire-TV. It is one of the last programs that work in this way.

According to Mørk-Eidem, then, fusing *Peer Gynt* and *Skavlan* allowed him to create a frame which the audience would recognise and that made it possible to tell Peer Gynt's story within a contemporary frame. Importantly, the idea of using *Skavlan* as a dramaturgical device sprung directly from the scene in the fourth act. Mørk-Eidem explains:

> In the fourth act he meets these guys. He is a businessman and quite a big shot, and he is in the middle of his life, where also Eindride [Eidsvold – the actor playing Peer] is. So we needed to start there. And then (…) we had an idea about him being in this talk show, *Skavlan*.

As Mørk-Eidem suggests, the conversation between Peer and the four gentlemen and the story of Peer in general gain new and intensified meanings through being framed as a contemporary talk show. The iconic scene in the fourth act, fused with the talk show setting, became a key for Mørk-Eidem to unlock his interpretation of the play. It is important to note how there are two points of expectation at work here: both the iconic image from Ibsen's text (or rather from 150 years of renditions of it) and the iconic talk show *Skavlan*, which most spectators would know well. Mørk-Eidem set the two familiar contexts – play and talk show – up against each other, and their fusion and reflection of each other became the main through-line the audience could follow. Mørk-Eidem played with the audience's pre-knowledge and pre-understanding of both *Peer Gynt* and *Skavlan*, and the audience expectations around these two canonical phenomena in Norwegian culture became the main dramaturgic key to the production.

I would argue that the results of playing with points of expectation in Mørk-Eidem's *Peer Gynt* were opposite to Arnarsson's strategies in *Enemy of the Duck*. There, points of expectation became dramaturgical tools through consciously and explicitly playing and breaking with them, for example by explicitly tearing down the living room set. Engaging the audience through constant non-traditional interpretations of points of expectations became the dramaturgical key for the production as a whole. In Mørk-Eidem's *Peer Gynt*, it is the other way around: one point of expectation became the dramaturgical key for the production as a whole by anchoring the production in a clear and familiar image. There are certainly many ways of creating contemporary contexts for a play like *Peer Gynt*, but Mørk-Eidem's solution gains power through being directly connected to a moment in the play that has an iconic status in the mind of the audience. In his production, the solution to one specific point of expectation became the most important directorial decision because it was used as the point of departure for both the story and the aesthetics.

4.2.4 What does playing with points of expectation do?

In this section, I have explored how directors hold a playful and challenging attitude towards points of expectation, and how they utilise canonical status of canonical plays in their productions. Playing with points of expectation seems to serve three main purposes in the productions I have discussed: to create dramaturgic structure, to unsettle 'traditional' meaning, and to connect the canonical play to the contemporary theatrical situation. Particularly my discussion of Arnarsson's *Enemy of the Duck* and Mørk-Eidem's *Peer Gynt* shows how playing with points of expectation can become an important dramaturgic strategy to build a production around. The two directors utilised points of expectations as dramaturgic strategy in opposite ways. Arnarsson challenged several points of expectation throughout the production, but no individual point of expectation was necessarily more important than others.

Rather, the playful attitude towards, and even direct challenging of, points of expectation was perhaps the main dramaturgic structure of the production. The staging was built around questioning individual canonical moments and, by extension, the canonicity of the two plays, Ibsen and the canon as such. In contrast, in Mørk-Eidem's *Peer Gynt* one particular point of expectation was the basis for the dramaturgic structure of the whole production. The scene with Peer and the four gentlemen in the fourth act sparked an engagement with the talk show *Skavlan*. The fusion of play and talk show, and the playing with audience expectation of these two phenomena, then became the most important feature of the production and the frame which allowed Mørk-Eidem to connect *Peer Gynt* with contemporary Norwegian culture. For these two directors, playing with points of expectation was the dramaturgic basis for producing Ibsen's plays in the theatre.

The second main purpose that playing with points of expectation serves in the productions, is to unsettle the 'traditional' meanings and views of canonical texts. As I explored in my discussion of Rüping's *Hamlet*, for example, Rüping was able to unsettle and counter traditional views of the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy, by turning it from a contemplative reflection on the self to an outwards-directed propaganda speech. When meaning is destabilised in this way, new meanings can be introduced and explored. For example, Rüping explored the more uncomfortable and potentially dangerous sides of *Hamlet*, by presenting the titular character as a solo terrorist. Similarly, explicitly challenging the political potential of Ibsen's realist dramas allowed Arnarsson to explore the possibilities of politically engaged theatre, both in the specific context of the Ibsen Festival and in the contemporary context more generally. This leads to the final purpose of playing with points of expectation in the productions I have discussed: Such playing is a strategy for relating the playtext of the past to the contemporary theatrical situation. By challenging expectations of canonical texts, the three directors asked explicit questions about what theatrical productions

of such texts can mean today. Such questions are at the heart of their productions and can be seen as the main strategy for engaging with the audience, who are encouraged through the productions to reflect on what theatre and theatrical productions of canonical texts mean to them.

The way in which playing with and challenging points of expectations disrupts 'traditional' meaning and encourage a critical attitude towards the theatre situation can be seen in relation to Mouffe's view of critical art as counter-hegemonic. The strategy of challenging points of expectation can begin to disrupt hegemonic meanings and views and to create a space of agonistic reflection. Similarly, strategies that explicitly explore what the canon and theatrical productions of canonical play can mean in contemporary contexts can be seen as a starting point for engaging audiences in reflections on art, ideology and culture. I will further discuss this relation between challenging canonicity and counter-hegemonic potentials at the end of this chapter and in chapter six.

4.3 Points of expectation and characters

I now turn my discussion towards points of expectation in relation to characters and actors. In the previous section, I described how points of expectation related to texts work both on a textual level and on the level of staging history. This is equally the case for canonical characters. Such characters are of course defined by their words and actions in the actual play, but the staging history of the character is potentially equally important, as is the status of and expectations of the actor that takes on the part. When an actor plays a canonical character, they will, in many instances, be viewed in comparison to the interpretations of other actors, particularly by regular theatre-goers. However, audience expectations also run the opposite way, in the sense that famous actors in new roles will be seen in relation to previous roles and possibly to their celebrity status. Expectations based on previous roles and celebrity status

rely on film and the media alongside the theatre. It is therefore perhaps less dependent on repeat spectatorship and might be present in wider audiences. Once again, Carlson's notion of 'ghosting' is relevant when discussing points of expectation in relation to characters and casting. Carlson argues:

> Even when actors are not associated in the public (and media) mind with a certain specific role or even a certain stock type, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, once their career is under way, for them to avoid a certain aura of expectations based on past roles. The actor's new roles become, in a very real sense, ghosted by previous ones (2001: 67).

According to Carlson, well-known actors are almost always seen on stage in relation to their past roles and achievements. When it comes to characters and actors, audience expectation is related to both of these. The audience's experience of an actor playing a character is coloured both by other actors' interpretation of that character and of that actor's interpretation of other characters in other productions.

It is obvious that many of the productions I discuss in this thesis have to deal with audience expectations towards characters and actors, particularly productions of plays with a strong, famous character at their centre, such as *Hamlet* and *Peer Gynt*, and I focus particularly on productions of these two plays in this section. Performing *Peer Gynt* on the main stage of the National Theatre in Oslo, as Eindride Eidsvold did in Alexander Mørk-Eidem's production, means inserting oneself into a particular history. The play has been performed there several times before, and several famous Norwegian actors, like Alfred Maurstad, Thoralv Maurstad and Tor Stokke, have performed the part on the same stage. Even for audience members who have not directly seen these other actors in the part, Eidsvold's performance is surrounded by what Carlson calls 'an aura of expectation' related to the staging history of *Peer Gynt* at the National Theatre. Similarly, as I have already noted

in chapter two, Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson's production of *Hamlet* in Hannover was seen, both by Arnarsson himself and by theatre critics, in direct relation to Nicolas Stemann's production, starring Philipp Hochmair, on the same stage 16 years earlier. In stagings of canonical plays like *Hamlet* and *Peer Gynt*, the way in which the new actor performs a certain character becomes a point of expectation. In the following, I will discuss three ways of dealing with character that specifically take audience expectations towards character and actor into account. The three case studies are the portrayals of Hamlet in Arnarsson's and Rüping's productions, and the non-traditional casting of Norwegian-Ugandan artist Amina Sewali as Solveig in Mørk-Eidem's *Peer Gynt*. In different ways, the three productions utilised the process of 'ghosting', which Carlson describes as almost inevitable, to create new meanings in the theatre.

4.3.1 Battling the character in Arnarsson's *Hamlet*

The relationship between actor and character became perhaps the most important focal point in Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson's production of *Hamlet*. In chapter three, I discussed how Arnarsson exploited the text as pre-written material in this production by letting the script be present on stage and having Hamlet read out and stage specific parts of the text. I quoted Karen Jürs-Munby, who points to how in certain theatrical performances, 'the openly exhibited tensions between text and performance/performers (…) have supplanted the 'suspense' associated with dramatic theatre', and I showed how Arnarsson's *Hamlet* can be seen to fit her description (2010: 112). Jürs-Munby's description is useful also when discussing the relationship between actor and character in the production. Arnarsson did indeed exchange the conflict of the Shakespearean plot for the conflict between text and performer. This was particularly clear in Daniel Nerlich's portrayal of Hamlet, which was entirely based on the huge task it is for an actor to take on the most iconic and canonical of all

Western theatrical characters. In the production, the conflict between Hamlet and his uncle was more or less completely exchanged for the conflict between Nerlich the actor and Hamlet the character.

This conflict between actor and character played out in several meta-theatrical ways in Arnarsson's production. Jean-Pierre Maquerlot defines meta-theatre as 'all forms of playing within the *performance-text* that call attention to the dramatic and theatrical codes subsuming the stage representation' (1990: 42). As I also discussed in chapter three, Arnarsson's production continuously called attention to the dramatic and theatrical codes subsuming it. One of the clearest examples of this was how Nerlich's struggles to play Hamlet were made explicitly part of and a focal point for the staging. Throughout the performance, it was never completely clear whether Nerlich entered the fictional world of the play or whether Hamlet the character took control over the real actor Nerlich. In the beginning of the performance Nerlich/Hamlet seemed to be in control of the performance and the text, as he in many ways directed the other players using Shakespeare's text. I have already described how the play started with Nerlich/Hamlet setting the scene by reading out the *dramatis personae* and the first stage directions. Through this choice, Nerlich/Hamlet was the one that seemed to be responsible for making the performance happen. Another example of Nerlich/Hamlet controlling the performance and the other actors was a scene close to the opening, where the actor playing Francisco was walking on stage, while Nerlich/Hamlet read her stage directions from off-stage. As Nerlich/Hamlet mentioned the cold wind and the lighting of a lantern, Francisco was forced to react to and execute the directions, even if the actor made clear with her facial expressions that she found them odd or unnecessary. In this way, Nerlich/Hamlet became a substitute director for the other actors, not unlike the role Hamlet takes on in Shakespeare's text when he works with the actors on *The Mousetrap*. Nerlich/Hamlet seemed to be in control, both of the text they were working with and of the staging of it. So far, the

relation between Nerlich the actor and Hamlet the character was a harmonious one, and the two seemed to be teamed up against the other actors.

As I mentioned, however, the control Nerlich/Hamlet seemed to posit over the performance began to evaporate quickly, particularly through one striking moment. At one point in the production, Nerlich/Hamlet discovered the prompter sitting with the script on the first row. He grabbed the script from the prompter and was terrified to find all his words pre-scripted and controlled by the script. To use Maquerlot's notion above, the production called attention to a theatrical code that is normally supposed to be overlooked: the prompter and the presence of pre-written text. In this moment, it became clear both to Nerlich/Hamlet and to the audience that rather than Nerlich/Hamlet being in control of the text, the text was actually in control of him. Suddenly he realised that all the other characters were performed by actors, but he refused to admit that this was also the case for himself. The moment was powerful because it explicitly visualised the conflict between character and actor and between text and performers. Throughout the production these conflicts continued to be the central ones, and some of the clearest moments where it was played out was in Hamlet's soliloquies, which are the focus of my analysis below.

As I also noted in the discussion of Rüping's *Hamlet* in chapter three, the soliloquies play a central part in the reception of *Hamlet*. Scholarship has often focused on the soliloquies as the central feature of the play, and actors have often been judged on their interpretations of 'To be or not to be' and the other big speeches. In addition, as I also mentioned in my discussion of Rüping's production above, *Hamlet* is often seen as an extraordinary exploration of the inner life of human beings, and this exploration happens mainly through Hamlet's soliloquies, which supposedly give 'unmodified' access to the inner life of the character. This argument is for example held by Alex Newell, who notes:

> The strongest impression the soliloquies in *Hamlet* make collectively is that of an intense dramatization of the human mind as the innermost realm of consciousness, where the reality of the private self is distinguished from the public self, and where the reasoning faculty, looking before and after, finds and parses the terms of consciousness (1991: 18).

In this view, it is first and foremost the soliloquies that make the portrayal of Hamlet that of a conscious human being. Taking all these elements into account, it seems fair to suggest that the soliloquies are one of the most important and well-known features of, and thus important points of expectation in, *Hamlet*. Challenging 'traditional' views of the soliloquies can therefore be a powerful way of challenging both Hamlet the character and the expectations the audience have towards this character. This was exactly what Arnarsson did in his production.

In Arnarsson's production, Hamlet's first soliloquy – 'O, that this too too solid flesh would melt' – was introduced by Gertrude, who informed the audience that 'her son would now do a monologue' (Shakespeare, 2016: 2.129). As Newell points out above, Hamlet's soliloquy is traditionally seen as an expression of the private realm, but here it was publicly announced, and Nerlich/Hamlet had to perform the soliloquy not only in front of the audience but in front of the other characters as well. As Nerlich, at this point covered in black paint, began to say the words into a microphone downstage, the other actors sung a cabaret-like song upstage, each musical phrase ending with the words: 'Erste Monolog' ('First soliloquy'). Simultaneously, Gertrude wiped the paint off Nerlich with a handkerchief, which made it hard for him to talk, while Claudius drank water from a bottle only to spit it out again all over Nerlich/Hamlet. Nerlich/Hamlet had to fight against all of these elements to get the words across, but both the visual and musical elements made it very difficult to establish proper communication with the audience. In this moment of the production, then, Hamlet lost the

most powerful tools Shakespeare gives him: the words and the ability to communicate directly with the audience.

The staging of this soliloquy can be seen as an example of what Hans-Thies Lehmann calls 'plethora', or extreme density of signs. Lehmann writes about how postdramatic theatre often plays with 'the more or less established *norm of sign density*', and he claims that there 'is either too much or too little' (2006: 89).[10] In the example above, there was clearly too much. The loud music, the actors' singing, Claudius' water-spitting and Gertrude wiping the paint of her son's face made it almost impossible to follow Hamlet's words, which would normally be the most important (sometimes even the only) element at this point in the play. By staging the soliloquy through plethora, understood as an extreme accumulation of signs, Arnarsson broke the form of the soliloquy, which the play itself is so known for. Arnarsson was not staging the text in this instance. Rather he was staging the difficulties of staging the text, and in doing so challenged and worked against the traditional meaning and cultural status of the text to create new meaning. This new meaning was not in the content of the words, but rather in the way the text and the staging worked (or did not work) together. The conflict between text and performance took the place of the traditional dramatic conflict between Hamlet and the other characters of the court.

The example of the first soliloquy demonstrates how Arnarsson explicitly staged the relationship or conflict between the text and Nerlich's performance. Later in the play, during the 'To be or not to be'-soliloquy, he again exploited this conflict, but this time the main focus was not on the relationship between text and performance, but rather on the relationship between Nerlich's performance in this production and the staging history of Hamlet the

[10] As I have previously noted, I am not arguing that Arnarsson's production is a clear-cut example of postdramatic theatre. However, the production clearly featured certain postdramatic characteristics, such as Lehmann's concept of 'plethora', and it is therefore useful to borrow this term to discuss the production.

character. The premise for 'To be or not to be' was the same as for 'O, that this too too solid flesh would melt', with Nerlich speaking the words into a microphone downstage. The disturbance this time, however, was not the other actors, but film clips of other famous Hamlets performing the soliloquy, which were shown both on two smaller screens behind him and on a bigger screen at the back of the stage. Most of the clips were from English-language films and productions with Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud and Kenneth Branagh as the most prominent figures. The result was similar to the first soliloquy, as Nerlich had to fight against the staging to get his words across. However, this time he was not fighting the conditions of the specific staging he was part of, but rather the inherent pressures of playing such a well-known part as Hamlet. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor note that this pressure is present for any actor taking on the role of Hamlet: 'Actors are haunted by their predecessors as well as by their contemporary rivals' (2006: 2). They cite Simon Russell Beale, who in an interview in 2001 stated the following: 'You see this list of Hamlets and you think, 'Oh, my God, no.' And there's Adrian [Lester] opening in five minutes. There's Olivier. There's Gielgud' (2006: 2). Beale here expresses how every performance of a canonical character like Hamlet is ghosted by previous and contemporary performances of the same part. Arnarsson put this ghosting explicitly on stage in his production. Normally, as Carlson points out above, ghosting happens through the individual and collective memories of the audience, but in Arnarsson's staging it was explicitly part of the staging as Olivier, Gielgud and Branagh were present with Nerlich on stage. Once again, Arnarsson's production was as much a staging of the cultural status of and discourses surrounding *Hamlet* as it was of the play itself.

In my interview with Arnarsson (discussed in chapter two), he describes the possibilities of playing with and staging the cultural status of canonical plays as one of his main reasons for working with them. He explained:

> I'm interested in social contexts within the texts, which means: if you stage a Shakespeare play, not only is it a very good text, but it also has a staging history, and I can use the staging history as another level of reflection on the play (2017).

In the examples I have given in this section, Arnarsson used one of the most famous feature of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the soliloquies, to execute what he describes in the quote above: to use not only the play itself but also its staging history and cultural status as the basis for his staging and as the main tool for inviting the audience to engage with the play in the theatrical situation. Arnarsson's production of *Hamlet* was a production about staging *Hamlet*. Throughout, the audience watched the actor Nerlich's struggles to perform Hamlet and to negotiate between himself, the canonical text, the staging history of the part and audience expectation. The plot and conflicts of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* had more or less disappeared completely by the end of the performance, and instead they had been replaced with, to refer back to Jürs-Munby, the 'exhibited tensions between text and performance/performers'. The character as a point of expectation had taken over the whole production; with the actor's attempts to live up to the expectation of portraying Hamlet displayed on stage.

4.3.2 Removing the character in Rüping's *Hamlet*

Arnarsson's production of *Hamlet*, which I discussed in the previous section, explicitly staged the problem that any production of the play must ultimately face: the difficulty of creating a fresh production when the play and particularly the title character is so famous and present in an audience's consciousness. Every new Hamlet will always be seen in relation to previous Hamlets, and sometimes the technical aspects of watching the actor's relationship to the character can become more dominant than watching the actual production as a whole. Arnarsson tackled this problem by staging the conflict between actor and character directly, thus pointing out the over-familiarity of *Hamlet* from the outset. Christopher Rüping used

another strategy for dealing with the canonicity of Hamlet. His production dealt with the canonical status of the title character in a drastic and efficient way. Here, the expectations related to the actor's portrayal of the character, which are so prominent in most productions of *Hamlet*, were actually avoided more or less completely, through the radical move of – to a certain extent – removing the titular character from the production.

As I have mentioned above, there were only three actors performing in Rüping's production. The point of departure for this choice was the moment at the end of Shakespeare's play when Hamlet orders Horatio to tell his story to the world. At the back of the stage there was a big screen where lines from the text were shown throughout the production. Early in the production, the audience saw the actors stare at the screen where Hamlet's line from the end was shown: 'in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain / to tell my story' (Shakespeare, 2016: 19.306-307). Thus, an interesting relationship occurred between the actors, the screen and the character of Hamlet. None of the actors played Hamlet as such. Instead, all three of them were Horatios, trying to tell the story of their former friend. In this process, many of the plays' characters were cut, and the ones that were left were alternated between the actors. Thus, all three actors took on the part of Hamlet in different moments throughout the production, but their portrayal was always once removed: the actors tried to tell the story of Hamlet and in that process, they took on the part of Hamlet, but this was always clearly a performance within the performance. Hamlet, as embodied in one person, was never present. However, the screen continued to present many of Hamlet's lines' and to guide the actors in how they were re-telling the story. Because the lines on the screen gave commands that the actors had to follow throughout the performance, the screen gained a kind of agency. If the character of Hamlet could be seen to have been present in this production at all, it would have been in the screen, which to a certain extent turned into an additional performer.

At the beginning of the performance, it was the screen that took on the part of Hamlet by commanding the three Horatios to tell his story. Throughout the production the character of Hamlet continued to appear through the screen and I will give examples of how this worked. Already before the scene I have described above where Hamlet through the screen told the actors to tell his story, Rüping introduced a prologue, in which the actors carried buckets full of stage blood from a tank at the back of the stage, and proceeded to cover the whole stage with it. Meanwhile, the screen listed all the characters in the play. Every name that appeared was then crossed out with a line, thus making clear that in *Hamlet* 'everybody' dies. Rüping's production wanted to change the 'traditional' perception of Hamlet as (anti)hero, and instead focus on Hamlet as brutal murderer. By crossing out the names at the beginning, the screen seised this part as murderer by visually crossing out the characters from the play. From the beginning, it was clear that the screen decided who would live and who would die in this production.

By deciding which characters to include and commanding the actors to act out the story of Hamlet, the screen gained a sort of brutal power that it continued to exercise throughout the performance. During the play-within-the-play, for example, Hamlet was portrayed by Nils Kahnwald, while the two other actors, Katja Bürgle and Walter Hess, played Gertrude and Claudius. Kahnwald made the two others perform the lines from the play that in Shakespeare's text is called *The Mousetrap* by directing their attention towards the screen where the lines appeared. Even if it was Kahnwald who made the other actors perform *The Mousetrap*, the screen fed them their lines and controlled their performance. Thus, the screen became the playwright-director of their performance. In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet writes an addition to *The Mousetrap*, essential for the performance in front of Claudius. He also works with the actors to create an appropriate performance. Thus, he can be seen as both author and director of that production. In Rüping's version, the originator of the dialogue in

The Mousetrap was the screen, because it prompted the actors to say those lines. Thus, the role of the screen corresponded to Hamlet's role in Shakespeare's text.

Similarly, at another point in the production, the screen played a central part in deciding the outcome of the story that was told. In Shakespeare's play, the scene between Hamlet and his mother in her bedchamber is interrupted when the Ghost prevents Hamlet from laying hands on his mother. The same happened in Rüping's version. Hamlet, played by Bürgle, attacked Gertrude, played by Hess, but the interruption came, not from a character or another actor, but from the screen which showed the word 'Stop', followed by a loud noise. In this situation then, the screen seemingly took on the part of the Ghost and thus also gained the controlling power that the Ghost has in Shakespeare's play. However, as I have discussed above, within the frames of Rüping's production, the story was once removed from the direct encounter between Hamlet and the Ghost. Here, the story was controlled by Hamlet, who guided the three Horatios through the screen. Within this frame, the screen's interruption in the scene with Gertrude was actually a correction from Hamlet to one of the Horatios, making sure that the story was told in the way he wanted it to be told. Ultimately, both the character of Hamlet and the power of controlling the production were given not to any of the actors but to the screen. As all the examples I have discussed demonstrate, it was the screen who actually played the main part in Rüping's *Hamlet*.

By substituting the character of Hamlet with a screen, Rüping removed the one-to-one relationship between actor and character completely from his production. The audience was never allowed to watch the technical aspects of how an actor interpreted Hamlet, nor were they allowed to compare this Hamlet with other Hamlets, simply because Hamlet as such was absent from this staging. The character mainly existed in the form of prompts and commands given by an object: the screen. It could be argued that this production was a *Hamlet* without Hamlet, and therefore also without the portrayal of the 'deep' inner life of a human being so

crucial to many previous interpretations. As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, some scholars, such as Harold Bloom, have seen Hamlet as the first image of a modern human being. Through his extensive communication of inner life, mainly in the soliloquies, Hamlet is, in this view, the first extensive exploration of the human being as a psychological, thinking creature with a will of his own. Teemu Paavolainen has written about the relation between subject and objects in the theatre. He argues:

> it is only with Renaissance humanism that "man" – no longer implicated in a transcendent order as in most premodern versions of the Chain [of Being] – emerges as an individual, set apart from "his" environment: a disembodied *subject,* enjoying a detached experience of an ever-uncertain world, reduced again to a theoretical *object* of contemplation (2012: 18-19).

Combining Bloom's and Paavolainen's arguments, Hamlet becomes an example of the 'subjectification' that Paavolainen describes. However, in Rüping's production this is turned on its head. Hamlet is no longer a conscious human being, but rather an object with human will. As the actors only follow what the screen asks them to do, the object (the screen) becomes the subject, while the human actors are in a sense reduced to passive objects controlled by the screen-subject. Thus, Rüping, through reducing the character of Hamlet to a commanding screen, also removes from the play *Hamlet* the Renaissance world-view it is built on and replaces it with a more contemporary worldview that is much more sceptical of seeing the human being as the centre of creation. Rüping's breaks with audience expectation of the character Hamlet make it possible to connect the play with the contemporary and use it to engage with contemporary issues. Rüping's *Hamlet* was no longer an exploration of the mind and actions of a character, but rather it was an exploration of what *Hamlet* can be, and mean, in contemporary culture.

4.3.3 Challenging a canonical text through casting in Mørk-Eidem's *Peer Gynt*

My discussions of Arnarsson's and Rüping's productions of *Hamlet* above focused on how the directors dealt with the character of Hamlet, one of the most canonical figures in Western theatre. In this last example, I turn to a less 'traditionally' canonical character, namely Solveig in *Peer Gynt*. However, even if Solveig does not have the same canonical status as Hamlet, she is, particularly in the Norwegian context, a well-known character associated with certain characteristics both through Ibsen's text and through the staging history of *Peer Gynt*. Below, I will argue that two particular characteristics are prominent in the popular understanding of Solveig: first, she is a complacent woman who spends most of her time waiting for a man, and second, in the Norwegian context, she is often portrayed as representative of stereotypically Norwegian tropes. In this section, I discuss how Alexander Mørk-Eidem's production of *Peer Gynt* challenged both these characteristics in the portrayal of Solveig. Mørk-Eidem cast Ugandan-Norwegian singer and actress Amina Sewali as Solveig, and he followed up with carefully tailored dramaturgical and directorial strategies that supported this casting choice. Even if these strategies can be problematised, as I will discuss below, the result was a production that questioned the relationship between Ibsen's play and contemporary Norwegian society.

As mentioned, Solveig has often been interpreted and represented as a 'submissive' woman. When Ibsen first introduces her, Peer provides the following description of her:

> How fair she is!
> I never saw such a girl! She dropped
> Her eyes to her shoes and her white apron,
> And clutched tight to her mother's skirt,
> And carried a psalmbook wrapped in linen.
> I must look at that girl (Ibsen, 2000b: 46).

In this passage, the reason why Peer pays special attention to Solveig seems to be that she features certain characteristics (such as keeping her gaze low) that are associated with an old-fashioned, male-dominated view of a compliant woman. Marit Aalen and Anders Zachrisson emphasise this interpretation: 'Peer meets Solveig at a wedding ceremony and is smitten by her young and bright innocence' (2013: 137). It is Solveig's submissive innocence that catches Peer's attention, and this is further strengthened in the next act when Ingrid wants Peer to stay with her, while he only has thoughts for Solveig:

> Have you a psalm book wrapped in linen?
> Golden hair about your shoulders?
> Do you drop your eyes to your apron?
> Do you cling to your mother's skirt?
> Tell me! (Ibsen, 2000b: 54)

Even though Peer has affairs with several women throughout the play, he shows real fascination only for the one who is submissive and shy. As Joan Templeton puts it: 'Only this innocent, flaxen-haired maiden in regional costume can inspire love in the promiscuous puritan Peer, who has fallen in love with Solveig's virginal inaccessibility' (1997: 94). It is Solveig's association with virginity, innocence and submissiveness that arouses Peer's interest and draws him towards her, and these are dominant characteristics for her through most of the play. The main example of Solveig's passive nature is perhaps the fact that she waits for Peer for years while he is travelling the world. When Peer returns at the end of the play she assures him that through all his adventures he has lived fully in her 'faith, in [her] hope, and in [her] love' (Ibsen, 2000b: 179). Thus, Solveig's main function in the play seems to be to live for, wait for and redeem the male main character Peer. There are of course aspects in the play which show Solveig's agency and power, for example her rather brutal estrangement from her family to live with the outlawed Peer. Nevertheless, the view of

Solveig as a compliant woman seems to be the most prominent in commentaries on the play. For example, renowned Ibsen scholar Bjørn Hemmer describes Solveig in the following way: '[Ibsen presents] only *one* image of her, as having only one role in life: as the fair, loyal and loving woman' (2003: 168, my translation). Similarly, Xie Lanlan argues that Solveig, and the other female characters Peer encounters in the play, 'do not articulate feminist awareness in the same sense as a number of the women in Ibsen's later socio-critical contemporary dramas' (2005: 172), and she points to how this has made Ibsen's portrayal of Solveig the target of feminist criticism:

> Solveig's passive waiting all her life for a man who lets her down and leaves her in the lurch has been like a red rag to a bull for the feminists of our days, who reject the patient and subservient attitude they believe they find represented in the Solveig character (2005: 176).

This is not an extensive review of the scholarly commentary that has been made on the character of Solveig, but Lanlan's argument nevertheless suggests that Solveig's 'passive waiting' and complacency has been a main feature in commentaries on the play. Below, I will show how Mørk-Eidem and the actress Amina Sewali challenged this view of Solveig, but first I will explore the second feature that has been defining of the character in a Norwegian context: her specific 'Norwegian-ness'.

In addition to Solveig's complacent nature, her specific "Norwegian-ness" is a feature both in Ibsen's text and in the discourse surrounding the play, particularly its staging history in Norway. In Peer's lines quoted above, one of Solveig's main features is her 'golden hair'; the stereotypical appearance of Scandinavian women. When she breaks with her family and meets Peer in the forest, she arrives 'over the heath on skis', a most Scandinavian means of transport (Ibsen, 2000b: 79). The name Solveig is typically Scandinavian and has its origin in the Old Norse, the language spoken by the Vikings. Thus, several points in the text highlight

Solveig's distinctly Norwegian heritage. Even the structure of the play emphasises Solveig's connection to Norway. Peer meets Solveig in the first act of the play, which takes place in Norway. She stays in Norway while Peer goes on his adventures in act four, and when he arrives back to his home country, she is the only person waiting for him. Finally, in composer Edvard Grieg's original music for the play, Solveig is given a song, which Grieg himself claimed had clear references to Norwegian folk music, and which today is among the most well-known pieces of Norwegian classical music (Benestad, 1993: 27). Thus, in the original play by Ibsen and in the music by Grieg, Solveig is a character particularly associated with the Norwegian setting of the play. This association of Solveig to the country of Norway has been enhanced by Norwegian staging history of the play, in which Solveig is often presented with stereotypically Norwegian features. In the other *Peer Gynt*-production I discuss in this thesis – Sigrid Strøm Reibo's production at Gålå – Mari Strand Ferstad was a very Norwegian Solveig with a traditional Norwegian backpack and woollen sweater. In the production in 1993 at The National Stage in Bergen, Solveig was performed by the nationally famous singer Sidsel Kyrkjebø, whom among other things is known for singing Norwegian folk tunes – performing a year later the Olympic Hymn at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games at Lillehammer, Norway in Norwegian national costume. These examples suggest that the Solveig-character is often characterised by certain stereotypically 'Norwegian' features, both with regards to costumes, to musicality and to the persona of the actor. Both through the text and through the staging history, Solveig has been established as a 'particularly Norwegian' feature in the play.

Having established these two main strands in the traditional image of Solveig, I will now discuss how Alexander Mørk-Eidem and Amina Sewali created a portrayal of Solveig that critically confronted these traditional images. Casting Sewali as Solveig can be seen as an example of what Ayanna Thompson refers to as 'non-traditional casting'. Thompson argues:

> [In non-traditional casting a]ctors of color [are] cast in roles not traditionally associated with race, color, or ethnicity in order to make a socio-political statement about the character's subjection, outsider status, untraditional knowledge, and so on (2006: 6).

According to Thompson, non-traditional casting is a strategy for commenting on the character, and particularly emphasising how the character stands apart from other characters through outsider status or untraditional knowledge. This was indeed also the function of Mørk-Eidem's choice to cast Amina Sewali as Solveig. In addition, as I will discuss further below, the effects of the non-traditional casting choice were further heightened by the fact that the Solveig character is *precisely* associated with a certain nationality and ethnicity, but a different ethnicity from that of the actor. In the following, I will discuss how the production made socio-political statements both about the character itself and about issues of national and ethnic identity in contemporary Norway through the non-traditional casting and non-traditional portrayal of Solveig.

Above, I demonstrated that Solveig has traditionally been seen as a stereotypically 'Norwegian' character, and in casting an ethnic minority actor in this part on the main stage of the National Theatre, Mørk-Eidem breaks with tradition and with audience expectation. However, the casting of Sewali as Solveig was supported by several carefully developed dramaturgical choices in the production. These choices continuously highlighted Sewali's ethnic minority background and the untraditional relationship her background formed with the part of Solveig. Thus, the production was not an instance of what Thompson calls 'color blind casting', where 'the audience is expected to make a distinction between the actor's appearance and the character's position' (2006: 6). Rather, Sewali's ethnic background was weaved into the plot of the play. Mørk-Eidem took his cue from the fact that Solveig and her family are strangers in the valley where Peer lives. In Ibsen's text they have moved from

Heddal, a neighbouring valley, but in Mørk-Eidem's production they were immigrants from a different country. When Solveig first entered with her family, both her and her mother wore hijabs. At certain times the family spoke what sounded like Arabic together, and the audience quickly learned that the name Solveig was actually changed to Shamso, the Arabic word for 'sun'.[11] Therefore, everything that is traditionally 'known' about Ibsen's stereotypically 'Norwegian' Solveig was 'translated' into elements that signalled African and Muslim heritage. Even musically, Shamso's ethnic background was pointed out. Sewali is also a singer, and throughout the production she performed small musical interludes, including her own version of Grieg's 'Solveig's song'. Sewali's version included beatboxing and different rhythms that gave clear associations to minority youth cultures in Norway. Thus, Mørk-Eidem and Sewali completely transformed Solveig's character in appearance, and the casting choice was reinforced throughout with dramaturgic choices that re-contextualised the character.

Figure 6: Amina Sewali (Solveig/Shamso) in Mørk-Eidem's production of Peer Gynt *at Nationaltheatret, Oslo. Photo: Gisle Bjørnebye.*

[11] In Norwegian 'Solveig' means quite literally 'Sun Road'.

The transformation of the traditional image of Solveig became a powerful, if also potentially problematic, political point in the production. It can perhaps be considered a political act in itself to open up the part to a minority actor at the main stage of the National Theatre, but there are of course also problematic factors in this practice. It is clear that Sewali still existed in the production as 'the black person'. The audience was not supposed to look past her ethnicity, which was still one of her main features or qualities as a performer within the frames of the production. As such, she stood apart from the other performers, but perhaps more importantly in the portrayal of Norwegian society that Mørk-Eidem constructed in the production, as an 'other' or 'stranger'. In her book *Strange Encounters*, Sara Ahmed writes about what she calls 'stranger fetishism'. Ahmed is critical of the concept of 'the stranger' as such, or, as she puts it, she wants to 'question the assumption that we can have an ontology of strangers, that it is possible to simply *be a stranger*' (2000: 3). In her analysis, she reveals several pitfalls and dangers around the habit of naming other people 'strangers'. One such danger is that the term 'stranger', 'works to conceal differences; it allows different forms of displacement to be gathered together in the singularity of a given name' (2000: 5). Ahmed's comment can be a source for criticism of Mørk-Eidem's portrayal of Solveig/Shamso. In the production, Sewali represented the generic 'immigrant', as there were very few attempts at giving the character a specific background. Thus, the complexity of the socio-political issues surrounding 'immigrants' in contemporary Norway, were glossed over in Sewali's performance. It is possible to argue that the character of Solveig/Shamso in the production was a tokenistic representation of 'an immigrant' that failed to actually engage with experiences of immigrants in contemporary Norway.

However, it is also possible to see how Mørk-Eidem's casting choice made some productive contributions to issues around immigration as well. Thompson argues that non-

traditional casting – of which her descriptions fit Mørk-Eidem's portrayal of Solveig/Shamso – can be a device for socio-political statements. She argues:

> Directors and producers who engage in this practice do not assume that the audience can or will be "blind" to an actor's color, race, or ethnicity. Actors and directors, then, exploit this lack of "blindness" by drawing attention to the actor's race (2006: 7).

In the practice Thompson describes, the political potential lies not in the audience accepting and looking past the performer's ethnicity, but in the exploitation of the actors' ethnicity and the audience's inability to be blind to it. Used in appropriate ways, as I believe Mørk-Eidem did at least to a certain extent, I would argue that also this approach can create powerful political messages. In Mørk-Eidem's production the political discussion centred around the role of ethnic minorities in contemporary Norway. Nadine Holdsworth argues that 'theatre is deeply implicated in constructing the nation through the imaginative realm and provides a site where the nation can be put under the microscope' (2010: 6). This effect is even stronger, I would argue, when the text performed is of such a national canonical status as *Peer Gynt* and when the choices that are made highlight ethnicity and nationality in the way Mørk-Eidem did. Mørk-Eidem's casting choice put contemporary Norwegian values and culture under the microscope by exploring their relationship with ethnic minorities. A character that is traditionally viewed as specifically Norwegian was deliberately presented as an African immigrant; a representation of the 'new', multi-cultural Norway. She took ownership of Ibsen's original text through name-changes and musicality. Thus, even if Mørk-Eidem and Sewali's version of Solveig perhaps was too general in its portrayal of Sewali/Shamso as 'the other', the production succeeded in engaging directly with contemporary Norwegian debates about immigration and ethnic minorities.

However, Mørk-Eidem and Sewali did not only confront the traditional view of Solveig's figure with regards to her ethnicity. Above I have discussed how Solveig is usually

viewed not only through her 'Norwegian-ness', but also through her compliant or submissive nature. Particularly towards the end of the production Mørk-Eidem and Sewali confronted this side of the character. As mentioned, Mørk-Eidem's production was set in a talk show studio, and at one point towards the end of the production the host shifted his focus from Peer to Solveig/Shamso and asked her some typical 'talk show questions'. He first asked her how it felt having left her parents only to then be left by Peer. Solveig/Shamso's answer showed that she was not prepared to go into the role of 'compliant woman' often associated with her character: 'You take it for granted that my happiness is dependent on someone other than myself.' As I have discussed above, Solveig's purpose is often seen as living for Peer, but this interpretation of Solveig/Shamso was imbued with greater self-relfexivity and autonomous individualism beyond relationships to other characters. The host then attempted to make her tell more about herself, and he complained that we know so little about her. To this Solveig/Shamso asked: 'Isn't that Ibsen's fault?' She refused to live in the purpose Ibsen gave her, and claimed instead to be a fully formed person not reliant on either her partner Peer or Ibsen the writer.

This dialogue was the start of the final break with the Solveig-figure that Sewali acted out at the very end of the play. Mørk-Eidem's production seemingly ended like Ibsen's original; the Button Moulder, here in the shape of the talk show host, left Peer with Solveig/Shamso. However, as he left, Shamso suggested that her and Peer still had more to talk about. The dialogue that followed was adapted nearly word for word from the end of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* where Nora leaves her husband. Thus, Mørk-Eidem and Sewali contrasted the compliant and ideal Solveig to the Ibsen-character most famous for breaking with society's stereotypical expectations towards female behaviour: Nora. In the dialogue, Solveig/Shamso spoke both to her 'husband' Peer and to her author Ibsen, and she blamed them, like Nora in *A Doll's House*, for not letting her explore her full humanity. Peer

attempted to tell her that the play does not end this way, but she refused to follow the traditional ending by answering: 'I can't take that into consideration'. She then left, using one of the doors in the auditorium, creating the famous slam of the door that also concludes *A Doll's House*. Thus, a female character that in the original text and in the expectations surrounding that text is a compliant woman who lives to fulfil the ideals of a man disregarded this role completely and took a more progressive stance where she asserted her rights as both woman and human being (to refer back to the sentiments of *A Doll's House*). I would argue that such a stance is more powerful coming from the character of Solveig than it would have been coming from many other characters. Many members of the audience might have some expectations as to what Solveig should do and how she should behave, and the production itself pointed towards these pre-conceived ideas of Solveig through the questions the talk show host asked. When Solveig/Shamso broke these patterns, the break became visible and much more in focus than if it had come from a character the audience expect to behave along those lines, such as Nora. In this way, Mørk-Eidem utilised the problematic view of women embedded in Ibsen's text to create a new and clear message about the status of women that resonated powerfully on the contemporary stage.

To sum up, I would argue that Mørk-Eidem achieved three main goals through the untraditional portrayal of Solveig/Shamso. First, he communicated clear political messages about the conditions of women and immigrants, resonating with wider political debates in contemporary Norwegian society. That Mørk-Eidem used *Peer Gynt*, the most Norwegian of all plays, and the character of Solveig to make his points, made his political agenda even stronger. The fact that the play is canonical and that many members of his audience have some pre-existing knowledge of it, made such political statements even more powerful, because the production broke with audience expectations; thereby making the audience reflect on the relationship between their expectations and the production they were watching.

Second, Mørk-Eidem also criticised Ibsen's original text through his untraditional choices. In the dialogue at the end, Solveig/Shamso changes a crucial word in the lines from *A Doll's House*. The original reads:

NORA A great wrong has been done to me Torvald. First by papa, and then by you.

HELMER What? But we two have loved you more than anyone in the world!

(Ibsen, 2008: 97)

In Mørk-Eidem's production, the lines were slightly different:

SHAMSO A great wrong has been done to me Peer. First by Ibsen, and then by you.

PEER What? But we two have loved you more than anyone in the world!

This is one example of how Mørk-Eidem and his team adopted a critical attitude towards Ibsen and the play *Peer Gynt* in the production. Solveig/Shamso directly criticised the author Ibsen for the 'great wrong' that 'has been done to her', namely that she is not a fully developed character and only seems to be defined through the functions she has for the male character Peer. Thus, Mørk-Eidem challenged Ibsen on the points where he disagreed with the original play. His production was not a reproduction or fulfilment of the written play in theatrical form. Rather, it was an interrogation and exploration of the play that resulted in a production that on the one hand acknowledged the play's historical context and canonical status, while on the other hand questioned and challenged this context and status from the contemporary sensibilities of Mørk-Eidem and the other artists involved.

Third, I would argue that a production like this also can become a critique of the society and the culture of which it is part. In the Norwegian context, *Peer Gynt* has been elevated due to its canonical status, but as Mørk-Eidem pointed out in his production, celebrating this play comes at a cost – for example accepting the play's portrayal of women

and its potential mirroring of Ibsen's contemporary views. In his production, Mørk-Eidem celebrated that in Ibsen's text, which he saw as 'good', but at the same time he criticised what he found conservative, patriarchal etc., both in Ibsen's text and in the cultural consciousness surrounding the text. In doing so, he challenged wider cultural standards which the play represents. Contemporary culture is based on many types of long traditions, and one of them is the stories people tell about themselves through the texts we count as canonical. In Norway, *Peer Gynt* is one of the most important such texts. By exposing the problematic features of a text that has an important standing in Norwegian culture, Mørk-Eidem exposed some problematic features of that same culture. As I have pointed out above, Mørk-Eidem and Sewali's portrayal of Solveig/Shamso is not without problematic features. Sewali was still very much an 'other' in the production, and one can question to what extent her presence in the part of Solveig actually explored specific conditions surrounding immigration in contemporary Norway. Nevertheless, Mørk-Eidem at least attempted to question what it means to reproduce a play like *Peer Gynt* today, and he attempted to put this issue explicitly on stage in the production. In chapter six, I return to a more in-depth discussion on how such questioning of our relationship to the canon can be seen in relation to Mouffe's theories of critical art.

4.4 Place

So far in this chapter, I have focused on points of expectation as features of the canonical texts themselves, but points of expectation can of course be connected to any feature of the theatrical situation. As I discussed in chapter one, Ric Knowles argues that it is not only the performance text – 'the raw theatrical event shared by practitioners and audiences' – but also the material conditions – 'what has traditionally been understood to be the "context" within which the performance happens' – that 'shape both what appears on stage and how it is read'

(2004: 3). According to Knowles, the theatrical experience is always shaped by the material and cultural context in which it happens. He creates a triangle between the performance itself, the conditions of production and the conditions of reception, and argues that all three corners of the triangle play a part in how a theatrical event is experienced. In this last section of the chapter, I will discuss points of expectation related to the conditions of reception, and particularly to the location in which the performance takes place. The place in which a production is performed is perhaps the most obvious contextual element that shapes audience expectations and reception. Where a performance takes place, the reputation of the theatre or location, how easy it is to access, whether it is a national institution, a small fringe venue or not a traditional theatrical space at all, influences the ways in which the audience experience what they see. Knowles argues:

> [T]he geographical and architectural spaces of theatrical production are never empty. These are spaces full of histories, ghosts, pressures, opportunities, and constraints, of course, but most frequently they are full of ideology – the taken-for-granteds of a culture, that don't need to be remarked upon but which are all the more powerful and pervasive for being invisible (2004: 63).

According to Knowles, then, a performance space is always full of ideology. A performance space asks the audience to watch and experience the theatrical performance in specific ideologically determined ways. This is also the case when performances take place in untraditional spaces, because such spaces ask the audience to make connections between the play performed, the performance and the location itself.

In this section, I will focus on two productions held in very specific locations. The two productions are Sigrid Strøm Reibo's production of *Peer Gynt* at Gålå in Norway and Emma Rice's production of *Twelfth Night* at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London. Both the amphitheatre at Gålå and Shakespeare's Globe are spaces filled with tradition that give a

specific aura of expectations to the performances that are produced there. This aura is, however, not only related to the location itself, but occurs because of the locations' claims of special connections with the textual material. In the case of Gålå, the location is chosen because of its relation to Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. As I will further elaborate below, a particular aura of expectation and authenticity is created because the first acts of Ibsen's play take place in the mountains and valleys around Gålå, and this is presented as the main reason for producing *Peer Gynt* in this environment. A similar aura of expectation and authenticity can be found in the relation between Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and Shakespeare's plays. This aura is built not on a connection to Shakespeare's fictional worlds, but on the idea that his plays' theatrical potential will be released in a similar theatrical setting to their original performance. In both cases, the connection between the canonical text(s) and the location constitutes particular points of expectation. I will explore how Strøm Reibo's and Rice's productions negotiated, and at times also challenged, such expectations and the ideologies behind them.

4.4.1 Sigrid Strøm Reibo: *Peer Gynt* at Gålå

When Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* is performed at Gålå in Gudbrandsdalen in Norway, the location is among the most important elements in the production. Since 1988, *Peer Gynt* has been performed outdoors by Gålåvatnet (the Gålå Lake) where the lake and the mountains create a powerful background for Ibsen's play. Gudbrandsdalen is, in Ibsen's text, the actual setting for the first acts of *Peer Gynt*. Thus, the place itself offers a kind of authenticity to a production of the play, a sense of coming home, and the landscape and setting give the productions of *Peer Gynt* an elevated status. In addition to the landscape and its connections to Ibsen's text, productions at Gålå are also haunted by past productions. The amphitheatre by Gålåvatnet is the home of '*Peer Gynt* at Gålå' and is purpose-built for performing *Peer Gynt*

in the summer. Several significant and well-known Norwegian directors and actors have been involved in the productions over the years. A production here therefore always exists in conversation with last year's and those running all the way back to 1988. In these ways, '*Peer Gynt* at Gålå' is filled with traditions and expectations, related to the connections between the location and Ibsen's text, the nature-experience and the memories of productions in years past. The productions at Gålå are often presented as an 'authentic' *Peer Gynt* – the ultimate *Peer Gynt* experience.

In my interview with Strøm Reibo, she explained that she was very aware of the aura of expectation that surrounds productions of *Peer Gynt* at Gålå when directing her production in the summer of 2017. Playing with this aura of expectations was a specific goal and strategy in Strøm Reibo's staging. In the interview, she explained that playing with audience expectation always is a goal for her when she works with canonical texts: 'I want to break with expectations. I want to disrupt a bit. I want to go back to the text and see: What is the truth here (2017)?' Strøm Reibo's remark clearly demonstrates that challenging expectations and traditional views is a main goal in her production. Before I discuss this further, however, it is important to note the problematic side of Strøm Reibo's remark. It seems that Strøm Reibo is suggesting that there is some sort of truth that she can reach if she goes back to the text and studies it closely. Such a belief in 'the truth of the text' is problematic and dated. Roland Barthes famously claimed that the author as a source of stable meaning is dead. Instead, Barthes argues, '[w]e know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' (1981: 211). Taking Barthes' arguments into consideration, it becomes clear that there is no 'one truth' in a text that can be discovered by a return to that text. Rather, texts are always subject to interpretation, and the truth Strøm Reibo claims to find in *Peer Gynt* will always be

her interpretation of Ibsen's play. However, her argument is nevertheless significant for my thesis because Strøm Reibo claims that she seeks to break with expectations by returning to the text. She suggests that in her productions she wants to avoid the common expectations towards the text and the production and produce something that is not affected by such expectations or that acknowledges expectations and consciously works against them. As I have suggested above, the location at Gålå creates a specific set of expectations of productions of *Peer Gynt*, related to a national romantic perception of a connection between the iconic landscape and Ibsen's text. In her production, countering these kinds of expectations related to location was one of Strøm Reibo's main strategies.

Figure 7: The fifth act of Strøm Reibo's production of Peer Gynt *at Gålå. The lake and mountains can be seen in the background. Photo: Bård Gundersen. Presented in agreement with Peer Gynt AS.*

Strøm Reibo set her production in an unfinished theme park called 'Gyntiana', the name Peer gives to the country he wants to found in act four in Ibsen's text. Posters with information about the different attractions were hung around the stage, and several of the staging elements, such as a lorry functioning as a concert stage, a pool bar and a golf cart

were reminiscent of leisure parks or summer festivals. Thus, even if the performance takes place in Gudbrandsdalen, the untouched nature that is so prominent in Ibsen's text and in the advertisement of Gålå as the home of *Peer Gynt* was no longer the most prominent feature. Rather, the production presented nature as developed and commercialised. In this sense, Strøm Reibo's choice of turning Gålå and Gålåvatnet into the theme park Gyntiana can be seen as a critique, or at least questioning, of the concept of the institution of '*Peer Gynt* at Gålå' as well. '*Peer Gynt* at Gålå' can be seen as a Gyntiana in itself where audiences are shipped to the performance with buses from local hotels and where the area outside the amphitheatre is reminiscent of a festival with stalls and tents where the audience can buy food, drinks and souvenirs. Playing *Peer Gynt* at Gålå is of course not only a celebration of the Norwegian landscape and its connections to Ibsen's play – it is also a clear commercial exploitation of the same landscape. In her production, Strøm Reibo pointed out this side of '*Peer Gynt* at Gålå' directly. Thus, her production was not part of the celebration of the landscape and its connection to *Peer Gynt* in any straightforward way. Rather, it explicitly problematised its own conditions of production, its own value and its own *raison d'être*.

One staging element unsettled the relation between the landscape at Gålå, Ibsen's text and the production itself in a particularly clear and powerful way. As the audience entered the amphitheatre, the view towards the lake and the surrounding mountains was blocked by a big wall made out of plywood boards, which covered the full length of the stage. This was a very explicit break with the traditions and expectations that normally surround productions at Gålå, where, as mentioned, the landscape and the sunset is a prominent element in the way the production is presented, marketed and viewed. Strøm Reibo, however, robbed the audience of the iconic nature experience at Gålå. Even if the wall was later taken down, with the lake and mountains eventually becoming visible, the nature had to a certain extent been defamiliarised. Instead of making the scenic landscape a natural part of her staging, Strøm Reibo pointed to

how producing *Peer Gynt* in such a setting was not a self-evident act, and through denying the audience access to the landscape from the beginning of the performance, she encouraged the audience to reflect on the values behind performing *Peer Gynt* in this location.

Figure 8: Jakob Oftebro (Young Peer) and Marianne Nielsen (Åse) in front of the wall in Strøm Reibo's production of Peer Gynt *at Gålå. Photo: Bård Gundersen. Presented in agreement with Peer Gynt AS.*

Denying the audience access to the landscape can be seen as an important part of Strøm Reibo's project of breaking with expectation and presenting what she sees as a 'true' version of Ibsen's text. The notion of whether Strøm Reibo's version is 'truer' to Ibsen's text is, as I point out above, highly problematic, but the result of her strategy is nevertheless significant in the context of *Peer Gynt* productions at Gålå. By putting up the wall, Strøm Reibo encouraged the audience to see past the context of the landscape at Gålå, and she attempted to deny the audience the opportunity to idealise the iconic landscape as part of the national mythology surrounding *Peer Gynt*. She wanted to remove *Peer Gynt* (both Ibsen's play and the productions at Gålå) from the national romantic context, and through developing the idea of the theme park Gyntiana she explicitly questioned and interrogated the context of

'*Peer Gynt* at Gålå' on stage. In a similar way to Arnarsson's *Enemy of the Duck*, which I discussed above, the production self-reflexively discussed (and even criticised) its own value and context. To refer back to Ric Knowles, who I quoted in the introduction to this section, one of the ideological 'taken-for-granteds' of performing *Peer Gynt* at Gålå is that the landscape and its connection to the text adds both quality and authenticity to the productions. Strøm Reibo refused to take this for granted. Through blocking the audience's view, she defamiliarised the connection between the landscape and the play; thus directly challenging the points of expectation related to the connections between the play and the performance location.

4.4.2 Emma Rice: *Twelfth Night* at The Globe

At Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, audience expectations are greatly influenced by discourses around the building itself, and particularly around the claims of authenticity surrounding the building. Audiences come to the Globe to experience Shakespeare's plays in a reconstruction of a theatre that is as close as possible to the spaces they were originally written for. What audiences expect to watch at the Globe is a feeling of historical authenticity in the sense of a connection between Shakespeare's plays and the 'authentic' theatre building they were written for. Actual historical authenticity is of course impossible to achieve. Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper point out that even in the processes that led to the building of the Globe, 'it was clear that the reconstruction itself would be a 'close approximation' or 'best guess' (…), rather than the early romantic dream of an exact replica' (2008: 5). Nevertheless, a certain atmosphere of authenticity is created in the Globe, and this atmosphere relies on a perceived connection between this specific stage space and Shakespeare's playwrighting. As Franklin Hildy argues, the Globe is an 'articulation of the notion that there is a relationship between the way a playwright constructs a play and the

physical conditions of theatrical performance that exist during that playwright's career' (2008: 14). The atmosphere of authenticity at the Globe relies on attempts at recreating the theatrical conditions Shakespeare worked in and wrote for as closely as possible; for example, through the fact that the building has no roof, which means that audience and actors share the same light, the music is performed live and there is minimal use of technology, even when it comes to lighting effects or amplifying music. The only exception is that electric lamps are used to recreate the atmosphere of shared light for evening performances. Both in so-called OP-productions (Original Practices), in modern-dress productions, and even in productions of contemporary plays (often written especially for the Globe stage) these 'rules' have usually been adhered to.

As artistic director at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, Emma Rice changed these rules in her productions. She introduced lights for effects and speakers for the music. I will specifically focus on her production of *Twelfth Night*. In this production there were disco balls hanging over the stage and auditorium and a big lighted disco ball at the back of the gallery. Coloured lights were introduced to create effects, for example in the scene where Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Maria organise a party. In this scene, pink lights danced across the stage to create and emphasise the atmosphere of a contemporary house party or night club. As I have discussed in chapter three, most of the character Feste's text was cut, and instead the drag artist Le Gateau Chocolat sang songs based on Feste's text interspersed by modern classics such as Sister Sledge's 'We are Family'. The music was still live, but it was no longer acoustic. Instead Rice placed a modern band with electric instruments in the music gallery. Thus, there were many elements in Rice's production that worked against audience expectation of an 'authentic' early-modern staging. Most importantly, Rice broke with the expected authenticity at the Globe, but also with the ground rules that have been the basis for all previous productions at the Globe: the shared lighting, the acoustic music, and the lack of

modern technical equipment. The Globe has often had productions in modern dress, but these technical conventions, based on the conditions of Shakespeare's Globe 400 years ago, had more or less always been followed until Rice's artistic directorship. Rice's choices even made physical marks on the building itself, as the speakers and lighting rig were bolted to the pillars and walls leaving holes and marks. Many of Rice's staging choices, then, worked against a traditional view of The Globe space and theatrical conventions associated with it. Rice did not seek to fulfil the expectations surrounding The Globe. Rather, she introduced principles of contemporary theatre and culture in the space.

Figure 9: Emma Rice's production of Twelfth Night *at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, London. Electric lights and microphones can be seen in the background. Photo: Tristram Kenton.*

However, it is also possible to argue that several of Rice's staging choices were in line with what we know of early modern staging conventions. One example of this was her use of music. Claire van Kampen was the first Director of Theatre Music at the Globe from 1997 to 2005. She argues that music and musicians were visible and significant elements in the early-modern theatre:

> By looking at where the musicians were placed within the theatre architecture, it is clear that the presence of music within the place had an iconographic and classical significance (…) The music gallery, or 'room', being placed directly above the stage, in the centre of the *frons scenae*, is at the most powerful visual point in the stage picture (2008: 81).

One can argue that van Kampen's descriptions here also fit Emma Rice's production of *Twelfth Night*. Even if the music was electronically amplified, the musicians were indeed visible and placed in the music gallery, and the whole production was pervaded by music. The main musician, Le Gateau Chocolat, often took a centre position in the gallery when he was singing, and his version of the character of Feste was at least as musical as the character in Shakespeare's play. Thus, as in early modern stagings, music remained a vital force in Rice's production.

Another example of how Rice's *Twelfth Night* can be seen to follow early modern staging conventions is in the relationship between the actors and the audience. Director Tim Carroll describes the audience at the Globe as follows:

> Because they are in the same light as us, their own reactions are much more significant (and somehow volatile) than in a dark theatre. An actor cannot go out on to that stage and give a soliloquy without speaking directly to the audience. It would be perverse: they are clearly there in the same place as the actor (2008: 40).

This metatheatrical feature of The Globe has led to a performance tradition that incorporates the audience explicitly in the performances. The actors speak directly to the audience, they use the pit for entrances and exits through the groundlings and sometimes they even touch the audience or involve them in other ways. Rice's *Twelfth Night* followed these Globe conventions. For example, the actors spoke directly to the audience. At certain points the communication was not with the audience as a whole, but with individual audience members,

such as when Malvolio used one 'unlucky' spectator to rehearse the ways in which he would spurn Sir Toby. There were also entrances through the groundlings. Most notably, Sebastian and Antonio entered in a boat that was wheeled in and forced the audience to move for it to pass. Thus, the ambient atmosphere that characterises productions at the Globe was very much present in Rice's staging. Even the light effects contributed to this. As mentioned, when Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Maria partied on stage, pink lights flooded both the stage and the auditorium. This was still shared lighting, even if the lights were artificial. It was as if everyone – both actors and audience – were attending the party. Like in Carroll's description above, the actors and the audience shared the light and therefore the lines between fiction and reality were blurred – the party onstage took place among the audience and the audience were part of the onstage action.

To sum up, Rice's production was a complex negotiation of the canonical status of the Globe as theatrical space. Rice radically broke with certain conventions and expectations at the Globe, mainly on the technical level with electric lights and amplified music, while she exploited and developed other Globe conventions, for example in relation to how the audience was included in the performance. The production explicitly explored what can be done in a contemporary theatrical production to the Globe as space, to the theatrical conventions related to it, and to how Shakespeare's plays work within it. The first artistic director of the Globe, Mark Rylance, has argued that the Globe is 'the most experimental theatre space in England' (2008: 103). However, before Rice's tenure, the experimentation at the Globe mainly looked backwards and attempted to explore how early modern theatre architecture and theatrical convention can influence contemporary staging. In her production of *Twelfth Night*, Rice took the opposite view; exploring what contemporary theatrical conventions and technical possibilities can do to the space at the Globe and to Shakespeare's plays within it. In this

process, she both challenged and negotiated the architectural space at the Globe as point of expectation.

The reactions to Rice's productions show that the way she challenged expectation influenced different audience groups in different ways. It is unlikely that Rice's innovative staging strategies at the Globe broke the expectations of the average audience member, at least not in a particularly negative way. Many people who visit the Globe might have some pre-knowledge of the space and some expectations of what it will look like and how it will work in performance, but it is unlikely that most people in the audience would have a thorough knowledge of early modern theatre architecture and staging conventions or of the specific staging policies at the Globe. Rice's innovative staging strategies did not stop people from attending, as Rice's two seasons at the Globe gave higher than average box office returns for the theatre. Crucially, Rice's subversive attitude towards the traditional staging conventions at the Globe did, however, break the expectations of a different group of people, namely the theatre's board who decided to part ways with Rice after two seasons. In the statement that announced the decision, CEO of Shakespeare's Globe, Neil Constable, wrote the following:

> The Globe was reconstructed as a radical experiment to explore the conditions within which Shakespeare and his contemporaries worked, and we believe this should continue to be the central tenet of our work. Whilst the realisation of Emma's vision has been a vital part of our continuing experimentation as a theatre, we have now concluded that a predominant use of contemporary sound and lighting technology will not enable us to optimise further experimentation in our unique theatre spaces and the playing conditions which they offer (2016).

As we can see, the decision to let Rice go was directly related to her experimentation with modern sound and lighting technology. The conventions Neil Constable and the board saw as

crucial to the workings of the Globe were exactly the conventions Rice challenged in her productions.

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre is, obviously, a theatrical space that presents itself as having a very special relationship to Shakespeare's plays. Even if it has always been clear to scholars that the building only can become an approximation of an early modern playhouse, as can be seen from the remarks made by Carson, Karim-Cooper and Hildy, which I referred to above, the idea behind the reconstruction has always been that Shakespeare's plays will be 'at home' in this building and that this will result in particularly powerful performances of them. The use of certain early modern staging conventions, and equally important the avoidance of certain contemporary staging conventions, is an important part of this idea. As I have demonstrated, Rice did not completely disregard the building and its conventions in her staging, but she did challenge the limitation of available theatrical conventions in the space. Through playing with modern references, modern technical equipment and modern music, Rice attempted to release new potentials for staging Shakespeare at the Globe. In her production, the focus was no longer only on the binary meeting between Shakespeare's text and the early modern architecture. Rather, she introduced modern sensibilities and technologies in a more explicit way compared to traditional productions at the Globe. Rice rebelled against the hegemonic staging conventions at the Globe, but this can also be seen as an attempt to make Shakespeare accessible to more audiences. In Rice's production, Shakespeare and the Globe are not canonical institutions that require certain pre-knowledge and cultural capital. Instead the plays and the building facilitate meetings with varied contemporary audiences.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored several ways in which canonical texts are staged in contemporary directors' theatre, and I have specifically focused on how a text's canonical status itself can become the starting point for developing stagings and discussions in contemporary theatre. I have introduced the term 'points of expectation' to describe particularly famous or canonical points in a text or in a theatrical situation. Points of expectation are moments or elements many audience members will know and which they therefore will have certain expectations towards. At first glance, points of expectation may seem like a challenge because the audience already know 'everything' about them, and so it is hard to create a theatrical situation that gives the audience something new and something to reflect on. However, I have shown how points of expectation become important theatrical tools for the directors through breaking with and challenging expectation. All the directors I study break with expectation, often in a conscious and strategic way. The directors actually often set out with the specific and explicit goal to surprise the audience through challenging traditional views and preconceived ideas of a play. This chapter demonstrates the varied ways in which the directors attempt to achieve this goal, and the results playing with and challenging points of expectation create in the productions.

I would argue that engaging with and challenging points of expectation and canonicity is an important strategy the directors use in their productions for creating a connection between the text of the past and the contemporary audience. In the introduction, I referred to Raymond Williams and Joseph Danan to point to a dilemma in relation to staging texts of the past in the theatre. While Danan insists on the necessity of finding 'in the plays that which will resonate in the language of the contemporary stage', Williams argues that the drama never can become contemporary (Danan 2014: 8). In chapter two, I discussed the problematic sides of the concept of 'relevance', and I argued that claiming that a text is 'relevant' always

excludes other voices and views. An important question to ask then, which I also point to in the introduction, is: Why should we continue to produce canonical texts in the theatre at all? In the productions I have discussed in this chapter, the directors do not attempt to make the plays relevant or contemporary. Instead, questions about relevance, about why we should reproduce the canon at all and how the canon should be dealt with, are explicitly put on stage. Rüping points to Hamlet's violence and asks what such a figure can mean to a contemporary audience. Arnarsson directly stages the conflicts he and his actors are in both with the text and the staging history of *Hamlet*. Mørk-Eidem explicitly challenges the old-fashioned views he finds in *Peer Gynt*. Strøm Reibo and Rice stage the conflict between the plays, the location of the performance and their own artistic integrity as directors. In all these productions, a connection with the audience is created not through claims of relevance or contemporaneity, but through an exploration of what it means to stage these plays in the specific contexts of these productions and in a contemporary context more generally.

Thus, the productions I discuss in this chapter constantly play with canonicity and points of expectations in ways that to various extents interrogate the productions' own theatrical and cultural conditions and contexts, and that thereby also reflect on their own value. The audience is asked to reflect on why they have come to the theatre to participate in a theatrical (re)production of the canon, and what their participation means to society and culture. I believe that the ways in which these productions are self-reflexive, and also encourage the audience to be self-reflexive form the basis of a potential for counter-hegemonic artistic practices in the ways Mouffe describes in her theories. I have not yet fully explored this potential and whether it is fully realised in the directors' productions, and this is the topic of chapter six of the thesis. However, before I turn to a more theoretical reflection on the directors and their work, I offer an in-depth analysis of one specific production that dealt with canonicity in particularly explicit ways, namely Christopher Rüping's production of

Brecht's *Drums in the Night*. I hope to deepen the discussion of how canonicity can be dealt with explicitly on stage, which I have begun in this chapter, by focusing on one production in depth.

Chapter 5: Negotiating Brecht in Christopher Rüping's *Drums in the Night*

The focus of this chapter is Christopher Rüping's production of Bertolt Brecht's play *Drums in the Night* (*Trommeln in der Nacht*) at Münchner Kammerspiele in 2017.

By analysing one specific production in depth, I hope to extend some of the ideas I have already discussed in this thesis, particularly regarding how a play's history and canonical status can be used directly in creating a contemporary theatrical production. Rüping's *Drums in the Night* is a particularly useful case study to investigate in this respect, because, as I will discuss below, it so explicitly and in complex ways negotiated the play's origin and past and the play's creator and his ideas. Thus, not only the play itself, but its cultural status, its staging history and the author's status served as basis for the production. I was able to be present in Munich and observe the rehearsals for this production in the fall of 2017, from the first day until opening night. In my discussion, I will draw on my observations of the rehearsals as much as on the actual production that was shown to the audience.

Drums in the Night is a 5-act play about the conflict between public political activism and private life. The plot takes place during the Spartacist uprising in Berlin in 1919. Soldier Andreas Kragler returns home after four years of captivity in Africa, only to find that his girlfriend, Anna Balicke, is engaged to another man and also pregnant. Kragler joins and eventually becomes a leader figure for the Spartacist uprising, but when Anna asks him to return to her and he has to choose between her and the revolution, he chooses to go home with her. Thus, in Brecht's play, the revolutionary hero chooses to disengage from public activism when given the prospect of private happiness and comfort. *Drums in the Night* was the second play Brecht wrote. It is not one of Brecht's better known or frequently performed plays, but it is nevertheless part of the Brecht canon. Tony Meech argues for the play's importance for Brecht's development as a playwright: 'These plays [*Baal, Drums in the Night* and *In the Jungle of Cities*] give fascinating insights into Brecht's concerns at the time of writing, as

well as the way in which his means of expression as a dramatist were beginning to develop' (2006: 65). More important for Rüping's production than Meech's literary argument, however, is the fact that *Drums in the Night* has a special place in the Brecht-canon because it was the first play by Brecht ever to be performed. Its inaugural performance took place at the Münchner Kammerspiele, the same theatre in which Rüping did his production, on 29 September 1922. The original production was directed by Otto Falckenberg, one of the most prominent figures in Munich's theatre history. In 1922, he was artistic director at the Kammerspiele. Today, both Munich's theatre school and one of the streets surrounding the Kammerspiele are named after him. Brecht, at the time only 24 years old, attended the rehearsals and was involved with the staging. Thus, *Drums in the Night* has a specific relation to the Münchner Kammerspiele and to theatrical life in the city of Munich, a relationship that Rüping utilised in his production in the same theatre 95 years later.[12] Rüping and his team sought both to recreate parts of the first performance, whilst at the same time going beyond this production in important ways. A detailed analysis of the production will follow below, but here it suffices to say that Rüping and the team in the first three acts of the performance used different strategies to reimagine the original production. In act three, this structure started to disintegrate, and act four and five, while still very much building on and being a response to the original production, broke out of the confines of the original performance to speak directly to the contemporary theatrical context. Thus, Rüping and the team created a production that was continuously in dialogue both with Brecht as author and with the particular staging history of *Drums in the Night*.

[12] Münchner Kammerspiele has relocated since the original performance of *Drums in the Night*. When I write that Rüping's production happened in the same theatre, I mean that it happened in the same theatrical institution, not in the same theatre building.

However, Rüping did not limit his negotiation of the play's status to engaging with the original performance. He also engaged extensively with Brecht as the play's creator, and particularly with Brecht's theories of theatre. As David Barnett explains, Brecht 'is something of a rarity in the field of theatre studies: not only did he gain an international reputation as a playwright, he also developed new ways of understanding theatre and new ways of making theatre as a director' (2015: 1). Brecht's canonical status is, as Barnett points out, related as much to his work as director, and particularly to his theories about theatre, as to his plays, and Brecht's theories are an important source of inspiration for many contemporary theatre practitioners. For example, Manfred Wekwerth, Brecht's former student and assistant at the Berliner Ensemble, wrote in 2011 that '[t]hese days there is no real theatrical talent that is entirely unaffected by Brecht' (2011: 65). Similarly, in the programme leaflet for *Drums in the Night*, Rüping suggests that '[t]he strategies and ideas [behind Brecht's famous concepts] are of course part of every form of contemporary theatre and therefore also of our production, but they are fragmented, taken further, synthesised, made personal, re-thought' (Deecke and Rüping, 2017). These are broad claims, and there are certainly many forms of contemporary theatre that have little or no connection to Brechtian theories. Nevertheless, Wekwerth's and Rüping's remarks point to how Brecht's theoretical innovations have been important for many forms of Western theatre in the latter part of the twentieth-century, and Rüping definitely argues for a clear connection between his work – on this production and more generally – and Brecht's understanding and theories of theatre. He seems to suggest that when he directs a Brecht-play, he responds not only to Brecht the author, but also to Brecht the theatre theorist.

The discussions in this chapter, then, aim at answering two main questions. The first is how the original performance, including the context in which it was produced in Munich in 1922, and Brecht's theories of theatre, was used in Rüping's production. I argue that engaging with these features of the play's background was the most important dramaturgical strategy

Rüping used to create his contemporary production of *Drums in the Night*. The second question is related to what kind of theatrical experience Rüping's engagement with the past creates for the audience. As is suggested above and as will become clear through my analysis, the way Rüping engaged with the play's background and with Brecht created a kind of self-reflexivity in the performance. Through engaging with Brecht's theories and the original performance, Rüping's production discussed the meaning of theatre through history. A main theme in the performance was what it meant to produce this play by Brecht in 2017 compared to 1922. I will argue that Rüping encouraged his audience to reflect not only on what they saw on stage, but also on their own role as audience and what it means to be a theatre audience today. Brecht always saw theatre as political and sought to create critical reflection in his audiences. In a similar fashion, Rüping engaged the audience in a critical reflection on their own position as theatre-goers in the 21st century.

Before I begin an analysis of Rüping's *Drums in the Night*, I want to clarify my role in the production. As I mentioned in the introduction, it is always important to acknowledge and scrutinise the role of the researcher in rehearsal and the biases that can arise from this role. I approached Rüping after having met him at a Showcase Weekend at the Münchner Kammerspiele in March 2017, which gathered students from all over Europe, and I asked him whether it was possible to observe some of his rehearsals. Rüping then involved the dramaturg at the Kammerspiele, Katinka Deecke, and they invited me to join the rehearsals for *Drums in the Night* the following fall. Although I was originally meant just to observe the rehearsals, the theatre administration needed to log my presence in a specific role in the production team. In the program, I am therefore credited as 'Dramaturgiehospitant'.[13] Through most of the rehearsals I sat in the room and observed. However, my role as

[13] A 'hospitant' in the German theatre is an unpaid assistant or intern. In addition to me, there was a Regiehospitant (directing intern) and a Bühnenbildhospitant (set design intern) working on *Drums in the Night*.

Dramaturgiehospitant meant that I did some work on the production as well. Before the start of the rehearsal period, I assisted Deecke with research for the production. During rehearsals, I controlled the sound, and most days I helped prepare the set on the rehearsal stage. I developed friendships and friendly relations with the other team members. I attended the party half-way through rehearsals and the Opening Night Party, and I had coffees and lunches with the other team members in the theatre's cafeteria. Once again, I find Lou Cope's description of the researcher in rehearsal relevant here. As mentioned in the introduction, Cope describes this position as a 'privileged-insider (…) at the outside of the inside of this extraordinary melting pot' (2010: 43). This is similar to the position I had during the rehearsals for *Drums in the Night*. I was an insider in the sense that I was present at every rehearsal, participated in the work and got to know many of the people involved in the production. At the same time, I was an outsider, as I had very little insight into the creative work and processes that happened outside the rehearsal room, and as an unpaid worker and observer, I did not have a 'set place' within the production team either. In the following then, I hope to be very open about my place in the rehearsals for *Drums in the Night*, and I will attempt to be aware of and scrutinise any biases I might have towards the work and the people I mention.

5.1 Recreating 29 September 1922 (Acts 1-3)

As mentioned above, in his production of *Drums in the Night*, Christopher Rüping used the first performance in 1922 as a point of departure, and particularly in the first part of the production he set out to 'reimagine' as closely as possible the production created by Falckenberg and Brecht. The exact word for this strategy was actually discussed quite a lot in rehearsals, including the word 'recreate'. However, 'reimagine' was chosen because the sources to Falckenberg's production are so few and thus so much was left to the imagination of the team. The sources include only some photographs, a few expressionist paintings and

some descriptions of the event. These sources were, however, exploited as much as possible both in the research carried out prior to and throughout rehearsals and in the actual production. In the following, I will analyse how a relationship between the original and the contemporary production was built in the first part of Rüping's production.

The first obvious similarity with the 1922 production was the recreation of the set, which in the original production consisted of two-dimensional walls portraying the room the action took place in at the front of the stage and the big houses of a city in the background. The set designer, Jonathan Mertz, created a set similar to that shown in the paintings and photos both in style and in scale, and he also made them out of similar materials, using mainly two-dimensional walls made of wood and cardboard. In a note that describes the set used in Munich in 1922 and published with the play script, another feature is also described: 'It is recommended to put up posters with slogans like "Don't stare so romantically" in the auditorium' (Brecht, 1967: 70, my translation). Mertz followed also this instruction, and every door to the auditorium was decorated with such posters. Thus, the set for the first acts resembled as closely as possible the original 1922 production. The note about the set also featured directly on stage in the performance, which began with the entrance of actor Nils Kahnwald, who read a description of the first night, including the note. His description of the set for the 1922 production ran as follows:

> This play (…) was performed in Munich with a set like this: The stage was small. The set was built out of wood and around two-meter-tall cardboard screens, which represented the walls of rooms. They were thin and not completely painted. Door, window and wall, all looked provisional. Above the screens one can see the houses of the city, which are also thin and mouldy. They look like how a child might imagine the eeriness of the big city.[14]

[14] This text is the version used in Rüping's production. It differs slightly from the published version.

As Kahnwald described the set, the stage workers brought on stage the elements he described. Kahnwald finished his speech in the following way: 'Münchner Kammerspiele, 29 September 1922, 19:30, *Drums in the Night*'. Thus, already from the very beginning, a clear connection was created between the present performance and the first performance at the same theatre ninetyfive years earlier. Kahnwald's speech directed the audience's attention directly to the parallels between what they saw on stage now and what the first performance might have looked like, and thereby the audience was invited to participate in the reimagining of the original production. It is significant that the audience was involved in this undertaking from the very opening, as the relation between the past and the present production became the most important dramaturgical key to Rüping's production.

Figure 10: Hannes Hellmann (Herr Balicke), Wiebke Puls (Frau Balicke) and Wiebke Mollenhauer (Anna) in the first act of Rüping's production of Drums in the Night *at the Münchner Kammerspiele. Photo: Julian Baumann.*

Rüping's work with the actors also reflected the first performance. The sources for the acting in the original performance were of course even fewer, but Rüping and the actors looked with minute detail at Brecht's stage directions. Brecht rewrote *Drums in the Night*

several times, and Rüping suggested that by using the text closest to the first performance and exploiting the staging hints that were to be found in it, it might be possible to come as close as possible to that production. However, the acting style that was created in rehearsals was not a recreation of acting from the 1920s. Rather, Rüping and the actors developed a style that reflected the *search for* the 'original' performance. For example, the actors followed the stage directions word-for-word, especially in the first act—limiting their performance to what was explicitly prescribed in the play-script. Thus, when the stage direction read 'Mrs. Balicke lays the table', the actress would do only this, paying minute attention to every detail of laying the table. At other points the results of only following the stage directions were even more stylised. This was noticeable when characters entered the stage. On Anna's first entrance, the text simply states: 'Anna in the doorway'. Because no other movement was specified, Anna stayed statically in the doorway throughout the next section of conversation; constraining the actor's freedom in a way that would not have been demanded in the 1922 performance.

One more decision was made in rehearsals that influenced the acting style in the first act specifically, namely the decision that the actors should listen to a recording of the act while performing it. In rehearsals, the actors made a recording of a reading of the first act that included all the lines and the stage directions. This recording was put on Mp3-players that were distributed among the actors. The actors would then listen to the recording as they performed the act, only saying their lines when they heard them on the recording, and adhering strictly to the stage directions by carrying out every action while not adding any action not suggested by the script. The result was a peculiar style of acting where the actors' focus was directed not towards creating characters or scenes or delivering the text as such. The acting was not life-less, it showed great concentration and focus, but this focus was directed towards the recording and towards copying and carrying out what they heard as meticulously as possible. Even if the audience could not hear the recording, except as

intelligible muttering from the earphones, the style gave a sense of copying something that was already set out.

The style that the Mp3-recording helped develop was clearly based on the search for the original 1922 performance. It was a style where the actors attempted to take on the movements and ways of behaviour of the actors who played the same characters ninety-five years earlier, but instead of showing the result of this attempt, the actors, in a self-reflexive way, showed the attempt itself. The acting style was not a direct recreation or even reimagining of the original performance, an undertaking that would have been impossible. Instead, the actors showed an attempted 'conversation' with the original performance. They 'recreated' some aspects of the 1922 performance, but also left out gaps when what might have happened could not be determined. This was supported by the costumes, which were black and with few details, and also gave the impressions that gaps had been left between the originals and these copies. As such, they were based on the black-and-white photographs of the original production and the research that had been done when looking at these photographs, rather than on the real performance those photographs show. Thus, both how the actors looked and what they did was an expression, not of the actual original production, but of the *search for* the original production including its inherent gaps. The audience was invited to join the actors in their search for what might have happened ninety-five years earlier and to use their imagination to fill in the gaps between the performance in front of them and the original performance.

In a way, the style of acting that was developed in Rüping's performance can be seen as similar to certain aspects of Brecht's own theories of acting. Brecht described how actors performed in the 'epic theatre' in the following way: 'The actors used a somewhat complex technique to detach themselves from the characters; they forced the spectator to look at the play's situations from such an angle that they necessarily became subject to criticism' (2015:

176). Brecht's actors detached themselves from the characters they were playing, and in a similar way, the actors in Rüping's production did not simply portray the characters. Rather, they portrayed the process of searching for how the 1922 actors might have portrayed the characters. The detachment was made particularly clear by the recordings, which made the actors focus on how to recreate what they heard on stage, rather than on creating 'their own' performance in the moment. Thus, the main point of detachment is important both for Brecht and for Rüping. Neither of them conceptualises the relationship between actor and character as a direct one-to-one translation and both highlight that the negotiation between actor and character can be visible on stage. However, Brecht and Rüping use this technique to quite different ends. Brecht, in the quote above, wanted the actors to be detached so that the audience would see them and the situations they were in in a critical light. Rüping describes the slightly different purpose of his approach in the program leaflet: '[T]his notion is so extremely moving: that more or less exactly 95 years ago actors stood at the stage of the Münchner Kammerspiele and said the same words that are now being said by our ensemble' (Deecke and Rüping, 2017, my translation). In an almost sentimental fashion, Rüping sees the repetition of history as 'extremely moving'. His view seems to be connected both to this specific theatre in Munich, and to the imagined connection Rüping's approach created between his contemporary ensemble and the original 1922 ensemble, and between the contemporary audience and the 1922 audience. Thus, we see a difference between Brecht and Rüping in their relation to repetition; where Brecht attempts to create a style that will engage the audience in concrete political messages, Rüping attempts to communicate something he finds 'extremely moving'. What Rüping is ultimately engaging in here is not the plot of the play, nor any particular political messages (neither Brecht's nor his own), but rather the art of theatre itself and its place in society. A style was created that set the current production in

dialogue with the original 1922 production, and through this the first part of the production invited the audience to reflect on the function of theatre more broadly.

However, even if Rüping's almost sentimental reasoning seems quite far from Brecht's critical, political arguments, there are still similarities in their goals, and Rüping's style was not completely detached from Brecht's political agenda. As seen in the quote above, Brecht's main goal is for the audience to look at a play's situations in a critical manner. An important strategy to achieve this in Brecht's theatre is to make clear to the audience that the theatre always presents events that have already happened. The quote above is taken from 'The Street Scene' in which Brecht attempts to give a model for epic theatre, using 'an incident such as can be seen at any street corner: an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place' (2015: 176). In the same text, Brecht writes the following about epic theatre:

> It is most important that one of the main features of the ordinary theatre should be excluded from our *street scene*: the engendering of *illusion*. The street demonstrator's performance is essentially repetitive. The event has taken place; what you are seeing now is a repeat. If the *theatre scene* follows the *street scene* in this respect, then the theatre will stop pretending not to be theatre, just as the street-corner demonstration admits it is a demonstration (and does not pretend to be the actual event) (2015: 177).

Brecht describes the events in epic theatre as something that have already taken place. The theatre makes clear that it is a repetition of an action that has already happened. This is very close to what Rüping attempted to do in his production, but there are some significant differences. First, for Brecht the 'repeated' events are the events of the plot of the play, which – whether they are completely fictional or to a certain extent based on real events – should always be represented as having already happened. In Rüping's production the repeated event was not the plot of *Drums in the Night*, but instead the theatrical production of these events

ninetyfive years earlier. The production was thus once more removed than what Brecht argues, and this removal created a clearly metatheatrical discourse in the production. Brecht showed repeated events; Rüping showed a repetition of the repetition of the events. Thus, the main object of focus in the production was not the story of Kragler, but the theatrical situation in which the story was presented in 1922. Rüping used Brecht's ideas of repetition to enter into a discussion about theatre, its role in society and the purposes and possibilities of this specific theatrical event in particular. It is the theatrical event itself that the audience is engaged to see in a critical light. Thus, Rüping's self-reflexive strategies are not purely self-reflexive, but they also ask important questions about what kind of political potential theatre has in contemporary society. Brecht's *Drums in the Night* discusses the nature of political revolutions. Rüping's production used Brechtian techniques to discuss the possibilities theatre provides for instigating political change today. I will provide a more detailed discussion of the political implications of Rüping's production below. Here, it suffices to conclude that Rüping in the first part of the production established a connection between his production in 2017 and the original production in 1922, and that this connection was the starting point for the aesthetics and for the discussions on stage.

5.2 Showing versus experiencing (Act 4)

Where, in the first acts, Rüping built the production on a reimagining of the original 1922 production, he left the original production more behind in the last two acts. In Brecht's text, the fourth act is where Kragler joins the revolution, while the fifth act is mainly dedicated to the meeting between Kragler and Anna and the choice Kragler has to make between her and the revolution. In Rüping's production, the fourth act was a deconstruction where the actors no longer played characters. For this, Rüping used the same method as he also used for *Hamlet*, which I have discussed in chapter three. In rehearsals, all stage directions and

character names were removed from the text of act four before the text was redistributed between the actors. In the performance, the actors performed the text in microphones with extreme clarity, but with less dramatic involvement. The dialogue-based drama from the first acts was therefore exchanged for a more poetic text rendition and atmosphere in act four. The set resembling the 1922 production was also removed completely, and huge pillars made of fluorescent tubes were hauled down from the loft, covering both the empty stage and the auditorium in an extremely bright light. Instead of the simple but still realistic costumes of the first acts, the actors now wore clothes made out of thick, white, semi-translucent plastic that to a certain extent wiped out individual traits and made them look uniform. In rehearsals, these costumes were described as giving a sense of a futuristic outer space. Thus, one can perhaps argue that the revolution in Rüping's production was not mainly political, against bourgeois society like in Brecht's play and in the actual Spartacist uprising, but aesthetic, against the confinement of the Brechtian form of the first three acts.

There was much discussion during rehearsals about how to portray the revolution that was to take place in the fourth act. In an article about the reception of Brecht in the first decades after his death, Klaus Völker notes: 'Revolutions cannot be made on the stage. The theatre cannot create political change; it can only represent it' (1987: 432). In the discussions during rehearsals, Rüping went further and argued that he also found the *representations* of revolutions and political change embarrassing to watch on stage. Therefore, Rüping did not create a realistic representation of a political revolution. Instead, he sought to create a kind of 'revolutionary atmosphere' on stage that ideally also would spread to the audience, who rather than watching a revolution from the outside would be invited to experience what a revolution might feel like. However, such a 'revolutionary atmosphere' was not created through political agitation, but rather through music. Rüping argued that big emotional engagement is today not found in most political contexts. It can, however, be found in Hollywood blockbusters,

and especially in their soundtracks. His argument was that such soundtracks often create and emphasise big emotions in a way that would be unsuitable for many other, more sceptically oriented contexts such as contemporary politics.[15] This use of music can perhaps be described as highly melodramatic, but that was exactly Rüping's point: the audience should be encouraged to *feel* the revolution, and the music was the means to direct their feelings.

In Brecht's play, the fourth act takes place in a pub where Kragler enters and is made the figure-head of the revolution. The conflict in the scene is between the people who just want to continue their party, and Kragler and others who join him, who argue for a revolution. This text was, as mentioned, divided between the actors who no longer played characters, but rather conveyed the text poetically through microphones. In the beginning of the act, the actors mostly read individually. However, as the act progressed, the actors would begin to interact more with each other and even say lines simultaneously. Lines designed to bolster the need for revolution were emphasised. Throughout the act, the actors' speech was set to music composed specifically for the occasion. One of the actors in the production, Damian Rebgetz, is also a musician, and he worked with Paul Hankinson, the production's composer, on a score. The two composed music for the whole of act four, and much rehearsal time was spent adjusting the text to the music and the music to the text. The music bore resemblance with film music, and it had a structure where it built towards certain peaks before releasing and building again. Towards the end of the act, both the music, the bright light and the actors' speech built towards a climax. The music increased both in intensity and volume, while further pillars covered in lights were hauled down from the loft. The actors began to speak

[15] One can perhaps argue that big emotions have made a return in contemporary politics, particularly in populist movements like Trump's in USA and Brexit in the UK, or in recent demonstrations against climate change. Nevertheless, in rehearsals, arguments were made about the lack of big emotions in contemporary politics, perhaps particularly on the liberal left.

together as a chorus while joining and speaking directly to the audience in the auditorium. The text was Kragler's lines from Brecht's script, where he encourages the people at the pub to join the revolution, and included lines such as 'The world is not too old for a better time', 'Take place by the machine guns' and 'You all have to join'. However, these lines were almost sung rather than spoken. They were not orders, but invitations to the audience to take part in the atmosphere. Thus, Rüping and his team attempted to create a sense of suspense and suggestion through the music and the text.

Figure 11: Damian Rebgetz , Hannes Hellmann, Wiebke Mollenhauer, Christian Löber (Kragler), Wiebke Puls and Nils Kahnwald during the revolution in Rüping's production of Drums in the Night *at the Münchner Kammerspiele. Photo: Julian Baumann.*

It was this process that Anna interrupted just before its climax with her request to Kragler to return to her. When the music and text had been built up to maximum suspense, the actress Wiebke Mollenhauer returned to her part as Anna and asked Kragler to come with her. The fluorescent light was turned off, and instead the working lights on stage and the lights in the auditorium were turned on. The break was particularly striking. The musical and

emotional build-up that had escalated through the act was cut off before its climax, and the story that had been abandoned for the past twenty minutes was taken up again. In rehearsals, the break was described as that moment when the club closes at 3am in the morning and the music is turned off and the lights on. Thus, as in Brecht's play, the revolution was interrupted before it took off, but this revolution was expressed through the built-up atmosphere of participation and excitement in the actors communicated to and shared by the audience. Instead of *showing* the audience an interrupted revolution – as is ultimately the case in Brecht's play – Rüping attempted to make the audience *experience* this interruption themselves.

What kind of revolution was it that Rüping presented in his production? I would argue that Rüping's revolution on stage engaged with the figure of Brecht in complex ways by both breaking with and adhering to Brechtian theatre and Brechtian principles. Within the framework of the production itself, Rüping created a revolution of form. With its non-realistic treatment of the text, its empty, fluorescently lit stage, its futuristic costumes and its reliance on electronic and amplified sound, the fourth act represented a break with the first three acts, in which the attempt had been to revisit or reimagine a style from the 1920s. The elements that characterise Brecht's text and the original production, such as a fictional story and the representation of fictional settings such as a living room and a bar, were removed from the stage and replaced with an aesthetic that was much more reminiscent of contemporary theatre, particularly of German Regietheater. Thus, the fourth act represented a revolution of form where 'old-fashioned' staging elements (two-dimensional walls, fictional situations and characters) were explicitly rebelled against and thrown out. These 'old' elements were exchanged for more contemporary conventions such as those mentioned above. The result was a postdramatic break where clearly defined fictional characters and narratives no longer existed. The focus was much more on the meeting between the actors and the audience and

the atmosphere that this meeting created. Once again then, a main theme in Rüping's production was the theatre itself. Rüping put the rupture between the original production and this production directly on stage, and thus he also raised questions about what a play like *Drums in the Night* might have meant in 1922 and what it can mean within the theatrical conventions of contemporary theatre that are clearly different from the conventions the play was written for. Rüping's fourth act, then, explicitly discussed what an older text like *Drums in the Night* can be in the contemporary theatre. Rüping did not present the answer to this question, but rather he made the exploration of it the main topic in the production.

However, while Rüping's portrayal of revolution highlighted the differences between Brecht's theatre of the 1920s and contemporary theatre, it also exercised a very Brechtian effect. Above, I have described how Rüping's revolution was an emotional atmosphere built up by the interrelationship between text and music. This atmosphere began on stage, but because stage and auditorium were equally lit and because the actors eventually joined the audience in the auditorium, the atmosphere spread to the audience, who were invited to participate in it. Thus, Rüping's revolution could at first glance seem quite un-Brechtian, because where Brecht is normally associated with exchanging emotions for critical observation, Rüping emphasised the emotional atmosphere of the revolution. However, I would argue that the way the audience was invited to engage with emotions in Rüping's production was more complex than the one-to-one empathic identification that Brecht was critical of. Brecht did not remove emotions from the theatre. In a text where he counters some of the most usual misconceptions of epic theatre, Brecht emphasises that '[e]pic theatre does not oppose emotions; it does not stop with inducing them, it also investigates them' (2015: 131). Brecht argues that theatre should not only portray and communicate emotions, but also critically scrutinise and investigate them. I would argue that this was what happened in Rüping's revolution in *Drums in the Night* as well. The audience was invited to participate

and perhaps even get carried away by the 'revolutionary atmosphere' created by the interrelationship between text and music, but this atmosphere was broken with the entrance of Anna. This was a significant moment because it interrupted and questioned the atmosphere that was previously established. When the bright working lights were turned on, the actors, and hopefully also the audience, were 'caught' in being carried away by the music and the text. To use a Brechtian term, the atmosphere that seemed so inviting moments ago was made strange. Thus, Rüping's version of the revolution was an investigation of the conditions that creates a revolution. The audience were invited to experience a revolutionary atmosphere that was then interrupted and scrutinised. To refer to the Brecht quote above, the revolutionary feeling was not only induced, but investigated.

I would therefore argue that the portrayal of the revolution in Rüping's production engaged in a complex negotiation of Brecht and Brechtian theatre. On the one hand, the style of the original 1922-production was explicitly challenged and broken down on stage. Rüping discarded most of the staging instructions that are implicit in Brecht's text and that can be deduced from the source material around the original production. On the other hand, however, Rüping actually adhered to the goals and theories behind Brecht's theatre. Like Brecht, he sought to use the revolution on stage for exploring the conditions of revolution in society. The focus of this exploration was a feeling of suggestion and participation; deliberately generated within the audience only to be broken and scrutinised moments later. Such a complex negotiation of a Brechtian style versus Brechtian goals was a theme running through Rüping's production. It will be the focus of the next section as well, where I discuss Rüping's choice to create two endings for the production.

5.3 A dialectic ending (act 5)

For the fifth act, Rüping created two different endings that played on alternating nights, a feature that is particularly interesting with regards to the canonical status of the play and Brecht as author, but also to Brecht as theoretician. As mentioned, Brecht's text presents a choice in the final act: Kragler has to choose between the public political activism of the revolution or the quiet private life with Anna. In Brecht's play, Kragler chooses the last option, and the final image of the play is of Kragler and Anna walking towards a huge white bed. The 'moral' is thus that once a person has the prospect of private happiness, they will abandon the political struggle for collective happiness. Rüping found that this choice between public political activism and private life is still very relevant today and he wanted to make this the main point of the production. However, he wanted to emphasise the choice even more than Brecht through creating two endings, one in which Kragler chooses Anna, and one where he chooses the revolution. I would argue that the two endings serve as a significant example of how Rüping engaged directly with the figure of Brecht in his production, and particularly of how Rüping's focus was more on Brecht as theoretician and practitioner than on Brecht as author.

Traditionally, the estate that governs the performance rights to Brecht's plays has been very protective of the plays, and rights have usually been granted only when productions have promised loyalty towards Brecht's original text and his own stagings (for many of Brecht's plays, the original stagings are actually available through Brecht's minutely kept Model Books). An example of the estate's strictness can be found in an obituary published by *The Telegraph* upon the death of Brecht's daughter Barbara Brecht-Schall, who managed the estate until her death in 2015:

> [In February 2015, only 8 months before her death, Brecht-Schall] requested a preliminary injunction, through Brecht's publishers, to ban a production of his play

> *Baal* at the Residenztheater in Munich. The play, which the director Frank Castorf had reset in post-war Vietnam, had been listed as one of the 10 most noteworthy productions in current German theatre, but Barbara Brecht-Schall was said to have been enraged by changes to the script. An agreement was reached and the theatre cancelled all dates after the end of February (*The Telegraph*, 2015).

The example illustrates how important the figure of Brecht as originator is to the Brecht estate. From an author-perspective, the Brecht-estate has sought to create an image of Brecht as originator, even of contemporary productions. As the obituary demonstrates, this is also the case when a production is directed by a prominent director like Frank Castorf and has been among the most successful productions in Germany. To the estate, it is important that productions of Brecht's plays are kept in line with how Brecht wrote the plays.

This reputation of strictness was the background for the atmosphere of excited surprise that spread among the team on the first day of rehearsals, when Rüping announced that the Brecht estate had allowed the production to create an alternative ending. Rüping himself described this as perhaps the first such opportunity in the history of stagings of Brecht plays. There was a sense from the first day of rehearsals that this production was about engaging with Brecht as originator in a new way. However, the Brecht estate had one condition for letting the production perform two different endings: when the ending not written by Brecht was performed, this had to be made known for the audience. The result was that in effect two productions with two slightly different titles were created. The two productions were similar up until the last 15 minutes of the evening, but differed completely in the conclusion, all depending on Kragler's choice. One kept Brecht's ending (Kragler followed Anna and left the revolution behind) and was called *Trommeln in der Nacht von Bertolt Brecht* (*Drums in the Night by Bertolt Brecht*), while the other had a new ending (in which Kragler left Anna and re-joined the revolution) and was called *Trommeln in der Nacht nach Bertolt Brecht* (*Drums*

in the Night after Bertolt Brecht). Thus, even if the theatre was allowed to perform a different ending, the Brecht-estate made sure that at least the observant audience member would know that one of the two productions was *more original* than the other, pointed out by the word *von*, which suggested that this was how Brecht himself intended it to be. The use of *nach*, on the other hand, illustrated that the production was based on Brecht, but not completely Brecht, not being loyal enough to the author's visions to get the approval of a *von*. Once the play opened, the two different endings were performed on alternating nights, and any given audience member would thus either see *von* or *nach*. The Brecht-estate made it clear that the version performed on the opening night had to be *von*. This is a particularly significant situation with regards to the negotiation of canonicity. On the one hand, it seems like a quite straightforward relationship between production and author-figure, where, even when the estate gave certain allowances for a freer staging, the figure of the author was imposed on the production through the two words *von* and *nach*. These words show how the attempts of the production to liberate itself from the author still was confined within a frame of loyalty where one (*von*) is seen as more Brecht than the other (*nach*). However, this straightforward relationship becomes more complex when considering the arguments Rüping and Deecke used when justifying the choice of creating two endings, which, as I will further elaborate below, were actually mainly related to Brecht himself. As we shall see, both arguments for fidelity to the text and arguments for changing the text circled around the figure of Brecht.

Rüping and Deecke defended their decision of making two endings by referring to Brecht; not to the play *Drums in the Night*, but to other parts of Brecht's writings. For the first day of rehearsals, Deecke had prepared about 150 pages of research – documents, texts and pictures – related to the production, and some of the documents were specifically relevant to the choice of creating two endings. For example, pages from Brecht's diary from the time he was writing the play were included. Many of the passages were crossed out as unimportant for

the purpose of the rehearsals, but some were highlighted, among them one in which Brecht wrote: 'Now I have two endings: comic and tragic' (1990: 168, my translation). This diary entry seems to prove that Brecht himself pondered on different outcomes to his play, and that at one point in the writing process two different endings actually existed, even if only one made it into the finished play. During rehearsals this was used as a reason for exploring what would happen if the opposite ending was created for the play. Another example from the research was the inclusion of Brecht's play *He Who Says Yes/He Who Says No* (*Der Jasager und der Neinsager*, 1930). This play was written eight years after the first production of *Drums in the Night*, and in it Brecht wrote two endings in order to show both sides of a moral dilemma, precisely like Rüping wanted to achieve in *Drums in the Night*. Taking these two examples into consideration, the argument seems to be that even if Rüping created a new ending in addition to the one provided by Brecht, the thought behind this choice was 'Brechtian', as shown both by how Brecht himself imagined different outcomes to the play and by how he put two endings into practice in *He Said Yes/He Said No*.

Rüping's choice to present two endings seems to align with Brecht's thoughts about 'dialectic theatre'.[16] Brecht describes the workings of dialectics in the theatre in the following way:

> So that the particularity of situations and behaviour that the theatre presents may emerge and be criticized in a playful manner, the audience creates in its mind additional situations and ways of behaving, and, while still following the plot, compares them to what the theatre presents (2015: 284).

[16] Brecht developed the concept of 'dialectical theatre' much later in his career than he wrote *He Said Yes/He Said No*. By referring to both elements here, I do not mean to homogenise Brecht's theories. Rather, I try to show how different Brechtian concepts and theories were used as starting points and as justifications in the rehearsals for *Drums in the Night*.

For Brecht then, it was important that theatre was created in such a way that the audience could imagine alternative actions, plotlines and outcomes. This is also the result of the two endings in Rüping's production of *Drums in the Night*. Here, the audience only saw one ending, but because the other ending exists, it will somehow be present even when it is not shown. When Kragler chooses Anna, the possible choice of the revolution will be accentuated and vice versa. Thus, even if Rüping is not in the strictest sense following Brecht's text, he is following Brecht's thoughts in creating a dialectical theatre. Where the Brecht-estate insists on the written words of Brecht, Rüping argued that his production, while departing from Brecht's play, was actually in line with Brecht's thoughts, theories and goals.

In a way, one can argue that there are two Brecht figures present in this debate. The Brecht of the Brecht-estate is mainly a figure of the written word, in the sense that to the Brecht-estate the most important legacy after Brecht seems to be his artistic writings – either in the form of the actual plays or in the form of his Model Books where his productions and directing choices are described. The estate seems to see Brecht as something fixed. What he put down in writing are fixed thoughts, recipes for creating the most effective productions of his plays. The Brecht figure of Rüping and his team, on the other hand, is a Brecht of thoughts and ideas. They see his writings as steps on a path of theatrical experiments. To them the actual strategies Brecht employed are not as important as the goals he wanted to achieve. In this view, it seems more in keeping with Brecht's ethos to change certain aspects of *Drums in the Night* because the goal is a dialectic theatre similar to the one Brecht described in his writings and searched for in his works.

As in my analysis in the previous section of the revolution in act four, it seems that Rüping's production engaged in a complex negotiation of Brecht's text, Brechtian theatre and what is perceived as Brechtian goals. In the revolution, Rüping discarded the style suggested in Brecht's play and the style of the original production, but the effect he created through

building up and breaking with emotion was similar to those Brecht describes in his theories. In the case of the two endings, Rüping changed the play by creating two endings, but the reasons for doing so was the fulfilment of specific Brechtian goals, namely highlighting the dialectical nature of the choice Kragler has to make between private life and public activism. Thus, Rüping's strategy is not a simple discarding of the original text to benefit the contemporary performance. His strategy can be seen as a complex negotiation of Brecht's text and Brecht's theories in the contemporary moment.

5.4 The Presence of Brecht in Rüping's Drums in the Night

Throughout this chapter, I have pointed to how Brechtian concepts and theory were present in Rüping's production. I have showed how the acting style Rüping developed for the first acts shared similarities with Brecht's epic style of acting, even if the goals and results of this style was slightly different from what Brecht prescribes. Similarly, I have shown how both Brecht and Rüping attempt to create a dialectical theatre, and how Rüping used this shared goal as an argument for changing Brecht's play. In the following, I will further explore Brecht's 'presence' in Rüping's production. I will first interrogate one Brechtian concept that is, perhaps, the most relevant for Rüping's production: 'historicising'. Once again, we will see that Rüping does not adhere completely to Brecht's version of this concept, but rather exploits it for his own goals. As Rüping himself expresses it in the program leaflet, he uses Brecht's theories, but in ways that are 'fragmented, taken further, synthesised, made personal [and] re-thought' (Deecke and Rüping, 2017). However, I will argue that Rüping's reworking of Brechtian strategies can be seen as a way to engage with what is perceived as Brechtian goals, specifically related to a politically critical theatre. Secondly, I will turn to a feature that Brecht and Rüping share in a more direct way, namely an experimental attitude to theatrical production and rehearsal. This attitude is concerned with exploring different alternatives to

develop the form that is best suited for each individual play and production. Through my discussion, I argue that the 'figure' of Brecht is very much present in Rüping's work with *Drums in the Night*, but this presence can be seen more in a wide engagement with Brechtian theories and the perceived goals of Brechtian theatre than in faithful adherence to Brecht's play or a Brechtian style. I also argue that the ways in which Rüping engaged with Brecht and the history of the play in the production created a special kind of self-reflection which encouraged the audience to reflect on what it means to produce older texts like *Drums in the Night* in the contemporary theatre.

5.4.1 Historicising

An important term in Brechtian theory is the concept of *Historisierung*, or historicising. Manfred Wekwerth explains this term in the following way: 'to "historicize" something means to understand it through its historical context, so how it came about and passed away again, and with this how it can be changed' (2011: 37). Historicising helps see something as part of history and therefore also as changeable. The strategy of historicising is the reason why so many of Brecht's plays, while commenting on contemporary political issues, are set in the past. *Mother Courage*, for example, is a play about war written in the fateful year 1938. However, the war described is not the World War twenty years earlier, nor an imagination of a contemporary war (that would have become extremely topical one year later). While war in contemporary times of course is the topic of the play, the plot of the play is set during the Thirty Years' War in the seventeenth century. Through such historicising strategies, Brecht wanted to create a critical distance that would give the audience a chance to understand the phenomenon of war, how it comes about, how it passes away and how it can be changed, to refer to Wekwerth. As Klaus Völker puts it: 'Brecht wanted to keep his dramas "open" to changing conditions. Thus, he created a distance from contemporary events through parables,

translations, and epic transcriptions. Brecht did not want "actualizations"; he wanted "historicizations"' (1987: 430). In Brecht's theatre, issues are explored through their history and their place in history. However, the portrayal of historical situations is of course in itself not enough to create the effect of historicising. Angelos Koutsourakis gives the following explanation of Brecht's historicising:

> According to Brecht's Marxist view of history, the appearance of the historical phenomena does not provide us with an understanding of the workings of history. It is only by means of a theoretical reconstruction and re-viewing of the facts that historical effects can be appreciated and understood, because the historical past and present are nothing but an established narrative. Thus, viewed from a different angle, they can offer a different assessment and understanding of the workings of history (2012: 170).

Taking this explanation into account, two points about historicising become clear. First, it is important that the theatre takes a critical and scrutinising stance towards the historical situations that are depicted. History is to be seen as a constructed narrative, rather than as 'true facts'. Second, it is important that this stance should be communicated to the audience as well, who will gain a better understanding of the workings of history and thus also of their own contemporary social conditions and how these can be changed. As Barnett describes it: 'Historicized productions are not only called on to imagine how different two different periods are, but to point out the differences as well, to stimulate the audience's curiosity and invite them to consider why such differences exist' (2015: 76). 'Historicising' in Brecht's theatre is therefore central to developing a critical attitude in the audience, who are encouraged to see not only the events themselves, but also the historical structures that enable the events and to recognise these structures as active also in the formation of their own social conditions.

In Rüping's production, the most obvious reference to history, namely the Spartacist uprising of 1919 that creates the framework for Brecht's play, is reduced and almost obliterated. References to the uprising were made in the text the actors spoke, but unlike in Brecht's original play, the uprising was never portrayed on stage. It never got closer than ominous sounds from backstage during the second act. Thus, the specific political setting that is so important in Brecht's play was reduced in importance in Rüping's production. At first glance this seems like an anti-historicising strategy. Rüping did not actively engage in the historical events suggested by the play, but instead he erased them in order to create a production more relevant for contemporary conditions. This is a strategy that Wekwerth warns against:

> Misguidedly rendering historical plays contemporary means they lose not only their dramatic tension (…) but also their contemporary nature. The spectator is no longer able to draw parallels between the alien happenings and his own situation, for they are already presented as his own (2011: 37).

According to Wekwerth, erasing the historical dimensions of a play also erases the connections the play suggests between past and present. However, Rüping did in fact not render the historical play as contemporary. At no point in the production was it suggested that the revolution on stage was a contemporary revolution. Instead, Rüping used another historical moment, the 1922 first performance, as a main reference point, and this created a much more complex relation between past and present. In a sense, there were at least three historical levels in the production: the Spartacist uprising in 1919, Brecht and Falckenberg's portrayal of the uprising in 1922, and the contemporary ensemble's work in the present to engage with these two historical moments. Thus, Rüping countered Wekwerth's concern because, instead of rendering a historical play as contemporary, he put the process of

engaging with history on stage. Historicising itself became both a main strategy and a theme in the production.

Rüping's engagement with Brecht's concept of historicising demonstrates that his production of *Drums in the Night* was not simply a modern rendition of the play or a modernisation of the play for contemporary conditions. The production did not attempt to present Brecht's play as particularly 'relevant' for today (– in chapter 2, I discussed some problematic sides of claiming that a play is particularly 'relevant' for new contexts). Instead, Rüping's production used historicising strategies to ask what it means to reproduce a play like *Drums in the Night* in a contemporary context. The production did not take itself for granted, but scrutinised its own biases and values. In this way, not only the subject matter of the play – in this instance the Spartacist uprising – was historicised and offered to the audience for reflection, but the actual act of theatrical performance itself was put in a historical context. The audience, in turn, was encouraged to critically scrutinise both the play, the context around its creation and first performance, and, perhaps most importantly, the context around this specific theatrical reproduction of it. In the same way as the production scrutinised its own *raison d'être* and sees itself in a historical context, the members of the audience were encouraged to scrutinise their own spectatorships and what it means to participate in theatrical productions today. Thus, historicising was still an important strategy in Rüping's production, but, in a self-reflexive fashion, the phenomenon that was scrutinised through historicising was theatre itself.

5.4.2 Rehearsal as experimentation

I have described how Rüping's production can be related to one specific Brechtian concept, historicising, and how this influenced the production as a piece of political theatre. However, I have suggested that, taking much of what is written about Brecht into consideration,

Brechtian theatre is defined more by a certain attitude to the work and the goals Brecht wanted to achieve with his theatre than to any specific concepts, strategies or means. This attitude and these goals have a lot to do with experimentation and openness. Barnett argues that 'Brecht believed that it was only in rehearsal that discoveries could be made, together with the actors. For Brecht, the director's work is not to provide grand ideas, but to enable productive practical investigation' (2015: 138). Also, the people who worked with Brecht at the Berliner Ensemble suggest that Brecht's working method was based not on the fulfilment of a style but on exploration and experimentation. Wekwerth describes Brecht's attitude to directing in the following way: 'Seemingly starting afresh with each production, [Brecht's] theatre tried to discover the acting method, the set design – the entire aesthetic which was right for that story' (1967: 121). Wekwerth seems to describe how Brecht, rather than having one 'Brechtian style' he imposed on each new play in production, instead worked to develop a new style and a new aesthetics for each new play and each new production context. Carl Weber, another assistant of Brecht's at the Berliner Ensemble, expands on Wekwerth's suggestion and describes what he calls Brecht's 'loose way' of work and 'experimental approach':

> Whatever ideas he brought to rehearsal he tried out, threw away, tried something else; sometimes 40 versions of one scene were tried, once in a while only two. Even when a production had opened, and been reviewed, he re-worked parts of it, re-rehearsed it, changed the blocking. The actors also took an experimental attitude. They would suggest a way of doing something, and if they started to explain it, Brecht would say that he wanted no discussions in rehearsal – it would have to be tried. Of course, his whole view of the world was that it was changeable and the people in it were changing; every solution was only a starting point for a new, better, different solution (1967: 103).

Wekwerth and Weber suggest that the real Brechtian working method actually is not a set style, but an experimental way of working where alternative solutions are tested and both actors and other team members are constantly involved. I would argue that Rüping and his production team in Munich adhered to this Brechtian attitude to directing, and I will give some examples below on how this method characterised the process.

On the first day of rehearsal for *Drums in the Night*, Rüping suggested that he found content and form to be the same thing. He explained that he wanted to create a production where the form was created based on what he, the team and the actors wanted to say with the production. Here, the Brechtian sentiment of 'discovering' both the content and form of the production through the rehearsal process came through strongly. Of course, Rüping did bring certain preconceptions to the first rehearsal. For example, he had the main dramaturgical structure of the evening – with the first acts reimagining the 1922 production, the fourth act breaking away from this, and the two versions of the fifth act – planned. He and dramaturg Katinka Deecke had done an extensive amount of preparatory research, and the set was already designed. However, the goal of the rehearsals was not to impose these ideas on the actors and create a pre-conceived vision. Rather, the elements I have mentioned above were starting points from which the production would develop through the rehearsal process.

I will give one example of this explorative approach related to the Mp3-players that I have also described in the section on the first acts. When Rüping introduced the idea of the recording and the Mp3-players, it was actually meant as a rehearsal tool and not as a feature that would make its way into the final performance. However, the actors rehearsed with the Mp3-players for several weeks and several recordings were made experimenting with different pace and rhythms. At several points the discussion was raised as to when the actors should stop using the Mp3-players. However, every time, Rüping and the actors agreed that working with the recordings was so interesting that the time had not yet come. After a while,

the discussion was raised of whether the actors should stop using the Mp3-players at all. At first, Rüping seemed quite sure that they would, but as the weeks progressed he seemed less certain. Finally, Rüping announced that there would be a vote in the rehearsal room regarding the Mp3-players. Everyone, including actors, designers, and even the interns, were encouraged to participate in the vote. The result of the vote was that the Mp3-players stayed and were indeed part of the performance on opening night. As I have described above, the actors would listen to the recordings also during the performance, and only say their lines or carry out actions when they heard their lines or stage directions on the recordings.

This example vividly illustrates the Brechtian attitude to directing that Wekwerth and Weber describe above where the form is developed through the rehearsals. An idea about Mp3-players was put on the table and tried out in rehearsal. The experience from rehearsing with Mp3-players was then considered and found powerful enough for Rüping to change the plans he had for the first act. This decision was of course Rüping's, but as in Weber's description of Brecht above, everyone involved was encouraged to give their opinion on the matter. Thus, the form of the production, in this case the fact that the actors would use Mp3-players during their performance, was developed through the collaborative working process. The style of acting that was created from working with the Mp3-players – characterised by the way the actors' focus was directed towards reproducing the recording as accurately as possible – was not pre-conceived by Rüping. He knew he wanted the first act to refer directly to the 1922 production, but he did not know how this would happen and what it would look like. The answer to these questions was discovered through work, and mainly through the method of trial and error that is so important in the descriptions of Brecht above. The Mp3-players and the style of acting they encouraged made it possible for Rüping to marry content and form in the way he wanted. The content of the first act was, in addition to the plot of the Brecht play, the relationship between this production and the 1922-production. The acting

style clearly showed this relationship, because it was clear that the actors were copying something that was conveyed to them through the recording. Thus, form and content became one. The content did not exist without the form and the form was meaningless without the content.

Thus, I would argue, one of the main legacies of Brecht in the work of Rüping was an attitude to the work that encourages trial and error to find the style that is right for the goals that are set out for the specific production. What such goals for the production are vary. For Brecht, the 'right' style was usually the one that made a dialectic criticism of the social conditions portrayed in the play. Rüping, although definitely sharing some of Brecht's willingness to engage in discussions of society, did not necessarily discuss political topics outside the theatre directly, but exchanged such topics for a discussion of the functions of theatre in general both in relation to this specific production and in society as a whole. Nevertheless, the two directors share an attitude to directing which sees rehearsals as a search for the appropriate presentation of the story. In the example above, I have attempted to show how concretely Rüping engaged in these Brechtian principles; in this sense, one can argue that Rüping to a large extent practices a Brechtian way of working.

5.4.3 Engaging the audience politically

As I have touched upon at several points throughout this chapter, a main thread through Brecht's theatrical work is to create a theatre that is politically conscious and that also encourages the audience to adapt a political and critical attitude. One last point to discuss in the relationship between Brecht's theories and Rüping's production is therefore to what extent the production was political and to what extent it engaged its audience in critical thinking. The French philosopher Jacques Ranciére makes a significant and useful remark regarding

how art becomes political, and he argues that art is not political because of its content and topics, but because it creates a certain situation for the people who participate. He argues:

> Art is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society's structures, or social groups, their conflicts and identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples in this space (2009: 23).

According to Ranciére, then, art becomes political when it constitutes particularly political situations that people participate in. It is not the content of the art itself, but the relationship it creates with the public that makes it possible for art to be political. Considering this theory in relation to theatre, one can argue that it is not the contents or topics of a performance that make theatre political, but the relationship a performance constitutes between itself and the audience in the public space.

In Brecht's writing, we can of course find political topics on stage. For example, we have seen how *Drums in the Night* explores the conditions of revolutions, and the relationships between the soldier returning from war and the bourgeois family. However, from Brecht's writings it seems clear that his ambitions for a political theatre did not stop at presenting political topics on stage. He saw it as absolutely necessary to change the whole function of the theatre, including the function and abilities of the audience. In an unfinished essay on 'Dialectical Dramatic Writing', Brecht describes the kind of audience he wants to create, and he uses Marxists terms to argue that it is not enough for audiences to 'consume' what is shown on stage, they also need to actively participate in 'producing' meaning through critically engaging with what the theatre presents them with:

> [T]he individual also ceases to exist as spectator and is no longer at the centre, no longer a private person who 'goes along to' an event put on by theatre practitioners, who gets performed to, who simply enjoys the theatre's output. Individuals are not just consumers any more – they have to produce. The event is only a half-event without them as participants (2015: 58).

As can be seen from this quote, Brecht needs an audience that actively plays a part in the theatrical event, and who self-reflexively considers why they participate in the theatrical event and what their spectatorship should or can produce. For this, according to Brecht, the audience needs to be educated: 'spectators should be specially educated, instructed, for the purpose of a 'trip' to the theatre' (2015: 59). Thus, to refer back to Rancière, Brecht makes it very clear that his theatre frames the audience in a very particular relation to the theatrical situation. Audience members are not merely passive 'consumers' of product, but should participate in critical reflection on the performance and thus to the creation of meaning in the theatrical situation. Brecht's theatre means to educate the audience to make it possible to participate in this way. In short, the theatre situation should not be taken for granted, but should itself be the object of critical reflection and scrutiny both by the artist(s) and the audience.

The political strategies of Brechtian theatre are of course manifold. However, I find this point about educating the audience to become critical participants in the theatrical event particularly significant in relation to Rüping's production of *Drums in the Night*. Throughout my discussion, I have demonstrated that Rüping's production again and again sought to explore its own *raison d'être* and the values and ideas behind its own existence. The production also sought to engage the audience in this exploration. The main strategy for engaging in this scrutiny of the production itself was a continued engagement with the original production in 1922. Thus, in Rüping's production, the explicit political subject matter

was replaced with a political dissection of the theatrical situation itself. The production reflected on what theatre meant ninety-five years ago and what it can mean today. This reflective attitude was what the production demanded of the audience. Because of the self-reflexive nature in which the production investigated the historical and theatrical context of the 1922 original performance, it implicitly asked the audience questions about what reproducing a play like like *Drums in the Night* means in the modern day context; what might artists want to achieve with reproducing it, and what outcomes might the audience itself want from such a production? The production did not provide clear answers to these questions, but in a Brechtian manner it directly enquired into the questions and demanded, at least implicitly, that the audience did the same. Thus, the production needed an audience similar to the one Brecht describes above: an audience that actively participates in the theatrical situation and one which reflects on its political nature and political implications.

This self-reflexive attitude and the way the audience was encouraged to scrutinise its own role as participants in the theatrical event is also where my discussions of Rüping's *Drums in the Night* inter-relates with Mouffe's theories of critical art. Mouffe suggests that critical art is characterised by its challenge to hegemonic structures and its facilitation of counter-hegemonic practices and voices. The hegemony that was scrutinised and countered in Rüping's production was that of the theatre itself and of its engagement with canonical texts. Instead of producing Brecht and *Drums in the Night* as a taken for granted starting point for contemporary theatre, Rüping's production invited the audience to reflect on what kind of act reproducing the canon in the theatre is and what kind of act the audience participate in when attending such productions. In the next chapter, I will discuss the political implications of the productions I have analysed throughout this thesis, including Rüping's *Drums in the Night*, using three Mouffian concepts: 'countering hegemony', 'collective identities' and 'agonistic public space'. My main argument will be that the kind of self-reflection identified in Rüping's

Drums in the Night, and in other productions, might not address all of Mouffe's points, but it can be seen as a starting point for making theatrical productions of canonical plays into progressive events that seek to engage the audience in a reflection on hegemonic ideology and what theatre actually is and can be in contemporary society.

5.5 Negotiating Brecht

At the beginning of this chapter, I set out to analyse one specific production in depth to further exemplify and investigate some of the arguments I have made in previous chapters regarding how directors engage with the canonical status of a play in contemporary productions. *Drums in the Night* is a slightly different play than the more obvious canonical texts I discussed in chapters three and four, such as *Hamlet* and *Peer Gynt*. It is not among the most performed plays in the theatre, not even in the Brecht-canon, and it therefore has less of a clear staging history to draw on and fewer points of expectations connected particularly to the play itself. Nevertheless, Rüping's production of *Drums in the Night* is a particularly significant case study here. While the play itself does not have a particular canonical status, its author does. Brecht is a canonical figure in the theatre. However, he is a different canonical figure than Shakespeare and Ibsen because, as Barnett argues, his importance comes as much from his practical work in the theatre and his development of theatrical theory as from his playwrighting. Rüping's production has been particularly useful to engage with within the present study because it so explicitly dealt with the origin and context of the play and its creator. As I have shown throughout this chapter, Rüping engaged in a complex negotiation of the play, the original performance, Brecht's theatrical theories and the contemporary theatrical situation in his production. Thus, this production is perhaps the clearest example of the kind of productions I discuss in this thesis: productions that use not only the play, but the play's canonical status and history explicitly as part of the staging.

My discussion of Rüping's production expands points raised in chapter four on how productions deal with points of expectation. In chapter four, my focus was mainly on how productions deal with points of expectations related to specific theatrical elements such as text, stage directions, character and location. Discussing Rüping's production in depth has allowed me to show how dealing with points of expectation can be part of a complex web of negotiation and pervade every part of a production. Rüping's *Drums in the Night* was a theatrical production about the status of the play and its creator and how the contemporary artist can or should deal with this status. To me, the most significant achievement of the production is that it was not just a production of a canonical play, but a production about what *it means to produce* such a play in the contemporary environment. As such, the production is a good example of Beverly Whitaker Long's term 'arguing performance'. Whitaker Long argues that in such performances, the 'performers metaphorically hold the written text at arm's length and perform their own commentary on it, pose their own questions to it' (1991: 111). In *Drums in the Night*, Rüping and his team performed their own commentary on and posed their own questions to the text, to its history and to Brecht. In addition, they went one step further by also holding their own theatrical event – what they had created and the audience that had come to see it – at arm's length, and they attempted to question the conditions of this theatrical event through the staging. Throughout this and the previous chapter, I have showed how directors attempt to explicitly deal with the canon and what it means to reproduce it on stage. I have, however, still not theorised this practice and actually coherently discussed what these productions achieve. In the subsequent and final chapter of this thesis, I use Mouffe's theories of critical art to argue that the kind of self-reflexive, self-scrutinising strategies evident in the productions I have studied can be the beginning of making theatrical productions of canonical texts into critical art.

Chapter 6: Self-reflection, hegemonic ideology and 'critical art'

In this thesis, I have explored and discussed both why and how directors work with canonical texts, and in the two previous chapters I have analysed how directors make negotiations of canonicity an explicit part of their staging strategies. So far, I have only to a limited extent discussed and theorised what kind of cultural and political potentials and implications the work of the six directors might have. Such cultural and political implications and potentials are the topic of this chapter. In chapter one, I presented the theories of Chantal Mouffe and particularly her concept of 'critical art' as art that disrupts hegemony, constitutes new collective identities around democratic principles and offers agonistic public spaces. My discussions in this chapter draw on these three 'functions' of 'critical art' to explore what kind of wider cultural and political implications the work of the six directors might have. Central to my discussion will be the notion of 'self-reflection', a critical feature in the work of the directors, which I analyse the impact of here. In the previous two chapters, I have discussed how the ways in which the six directors explicitly negotiate canonicity and cultural status on stage, at times leads to a kind of theatrical self-reflection. Several of the productions I have discussed have had at their core a questioning of the canonical material they are based on and thereby also of their own validity as theatrical events. In this chapter, I continue to explore this self-reflection in the theatre. I discuss whether it can become the starting point for disrupting hegemony and forming new collective identities and agonistic public spaces, as Mouffe describes, and I discuss whether such potentials are actually utilised in the work of the six directors. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first three each correspond to the three elements of Mouffe's theory that I discussed in the introduction: disrupting hegemony, collective identities and agonistic public space. In the final section I sum up my findings and suggest what they mean for how the canon is treated in the theatre. Throughout the chapter, I argue that although the canon and the theatrical productions of it that I have discussed, are

firmly positioned within hegemonic structures, explicit self-reflection can become a starting point for encouraging audiences to critically reflect on the ideological implications of the theatre and perhaps on hegemonic ideological structures in their own lives and more broadly within society and culture.

6.1 Disrupting hegemony

Throughout this study, I have pointed to a problematic aspect of theatrical productions based on the canon: since the canon is always an expression of hegemonic ideologies and values, it is difficult to see how theatre based on the canon can criticise and challenge hegemonic structures in society and culture. I have pointed out that the canon not only expresses old ideologies and values from the times in which the texts were written, but that it is also an expression of the hegemonic ideologies of contemporary culture, because it is in the contemporary world that texts are re-selected, seen as of 'high enough value' and thus reconfirmed as canonical. The canon is therefore always part of the hegemony of the status quo. In chapter one, I claimed that the canon can be seen as part of what Althusser calls the Ideological State Apparatus. As such, it is not only part of hegemony, but actively expresses hegemony and works to make hegemony seem natural and obvious to the people. As Althusser puts it: '*[A]ll ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*', or said in another way, a function of ideology is that it automatically turns individuals into subjects of the ideology (1984: 47, italics in original). Similarly, one can argue that the canon interpellates individuals so that they see the canon and the values and ideologies of and behind it as 'natural' and 'obvious'. This was at several instances the case in the interviews I made with the six directors, as they in their answers often accepted canonical texts as 'naturally good'. If such interpellation is indeed the function of the canon, engaging with canonical texts in the theatre might seem to counter what Mouffe describes as 'critical

art'. As I pointed out in chapter one, Mouffe sees critical art as 'interventions within the context of counter-hegemonic struggles' (2013: 8). According to her, art becomes critical when it works to destabilise, disrupt and challenge the dominant consensus and hegemony. In reproducing the canon, it appears that the theatre does the exact opposite of this, because it reproduces texts and values that have been selected based on dominant ideology and hegemonic power structures. However, throughout this thesis, I have showed how the six directors I study also use different strategies to challenge the canonical status of and dominant values in the canonical texts they reproduce. As I discussed in the final section of chapter two, the directors see the disruption of canonical status as an opportunity to create powerful theatrical experiences for contemporary audiences. The question then becomes whether the theatrical practices I have explored in this thesis actually disrupt the dominant ideologies and values expressed through the canon, or if theatrical productions of canonical texts, even when attempting to be disruptive, nevertheless become reproductions of canonical and hegemonic values and ideology. In this section, I will discuss this question both on a theoretical level and by linking it to the productions I have analysed in the thesis.

A theatrical reproduction of a canonical text of the past always occurs in the present, and therefore it can never simply be a 'reproduction' of the past. This is central to Peter Boenisch's concept of 'Regie', which I discussed in chapter one. Boenisch argues: 'As a medium, theatre establishes relations: via its production and performance, it relates the written playtext with the present moment, in which the audience sees and senses the playtext, mediated through the production or *Inszenierung*' (2015: 21-22). Text-based theatre does not only present a text; it establishes a relation between that text and the present moment. Margherita Laera notes how all forms of adaptation involve different types of shifts, one of which is ideological shifts. According to her such '[i]deological shifts are perhaps the most important to note' and she differentiates between 'intraideological transpositions [that] retain

the ideological landscape of their source [and] interideological ones [that] do not' (2014: 7). Importantly, Laera also argues:

> It is difficult, however, to find an example of intraideological adaptation, as the shift in language, culture, or medium always entails a refocusing and repositioning of the adapted work, and consequently of its emphasis on specific issues (2014: 8).

Taking Laera's argument into account, it becomes clear that it is more or less impossible to engage with a canonical text of the past without somehow positioning it within the ideological conditions of the present. The canon is always formed and engaged with within the ideological framework of the present, but the ideological gap between and old text and the contemporary theatrical situation offers opportunities for contemporary theatre makers. Sharon Friedman, who I mentioned in chapter one, writes about feminist adaptation in the theatre, and she argues:

> Theater as an institution reproduces social practices, discourses, and norms through the "technologies" of stage conventions and dramatic texts. However, theater also has the potential to subvert those norms, represent fragmented selves, and reinterpret fixed representations of gender for each generation of viewers (2008: 6).

Friedman writes specifically about feminist theatre and performance, but her observations here are relevant for theatre in general. Theatre reproduces both the conventions, content, and ideological framework of the theatrical situation and of dramatic texts. But it is also the case that because theatre is made in the here-and-now and always answers to the contemporary context of production, it has the power not only to present canonical texts and their cultural values, but also to explore, question and challenge those same texts and values. By acknowledging that a theatrical reproduction is never a direct transposition, directors and other theatre makers can scrutinise the ideological shifts their productions offer; thus countering some of the dated values and ideologies that are present in canonical texts.

However, this strategy not only challenges the values and ideologies of the canon, but also the values and ideologies of the contemporary context. When theatrical productions question the value of canonical texts, they also indirectly question hegemonic culture in the contemporary, in which these texts are seen as important. As I further develop below, it is this process that I argue can become the starting point for complex negotiations of ideology in the kind of theatre that I discuss.

I would argue that several of the productions I have discussed in this thesis can be seen as engaging in a kind of ideological self-reflection in different ways. In chapter three, I discussed different ways in which canonical texts are translated or transposed to the contemporary theatrical situation. Drawing on Venuti, I drew a distinction between strategies of 'domestication', which I found in the works of Emma Rice and Alexander Mørk-Eidem, and strategies of 'foreignization', which I identified mainly with Joe Hill-Gibbins and Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson. The difference between these kinds of strategies is largely a difference in level of recognition of the interideological nature of theatrical reproduction. As I discussed, Rice and Mørk-Eidem seemed to wish to translate the canonical texts as smoothly as possible for the audience. Their main point was to create understanding and an almost unchallenging experience for the audience, through changing the words and providing 'contemporary equivalents' to foreign elements in the texts. However, by doing this, I argued that the two directors, to a certain extent, overlooked the complex ideological negotiations that occur in contemporary productions of canonical plays. The productions recognised that the canonical texts build on a historically specific set of values and ideologies that is different to contemporary values and beliefs, but the directors attempted to hide and eradicate these differences. The audience was asked to 'believe' that Shakespeare and Ibsen are our contemporaries, if not in language and references, then at least in the core values the texts express. The more 'foreignizing' strategies of Hill-Gibbins and Arnarsson had the opposite

effect. As I discussed in chapter three, these two directors made the differences between the canonical texts and the contemporary the starting point for their productions. They pointed out the differences to the audience, who were encouraged to see them, recognise them and reflect on them. Hill-Gibbins did this on the level of content, by pointing out how *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contains gender relations that are problematic to contemporary sensibilities, while Arnarsson did it on a more formal level by pointing out that any production of *Hamlet* is always already contaminated by previous experiences of *Hamlet*. In both cases, the directors did not hide the interideological nature of the process of reproducing the canon in the contemporary theatre, but instead they made the negotiations of past and present explicitly visible on stage. As I will argue below, this is a starting point for, if not directly disrupting hegemony, then at least for not taking hegemonic structures for granted and encouraging reflection on the part of the audience.

Before I turn to how my analyses relate to Mouffe's notion of disrupting hegemony, however, I want to go back to the concept of 'points of expectation'. In chapter four, I argued that canonical plays and productions of such plays contain certain points or moments that are so well-known and iconic that audiences often have specific expectations related to them that also colour their expectations of the whole theatrical experience. Throughout my analyses, I demonstrated how the directors played with and used such audience expectations directly in their productions, and that this in many cases was the main strategy for making canonical texts resonate in the contemporary production. Here, I expand upon this argument by suggesting that playing with 'points of expectation' is at the heart of directors' theatre's potential for exploring, questioning and challenging dominant ideology. As I have proven throughout this thesis, playing with 'points of expectation' creates productions that actively engage with the value, validity and ideology of the canonical text and also of the theatrical situation. In addition to just presenting a production of a text (even a radical production), the

directors I have studied sometimes ask the question: what is the point of performing this text at all? Not only the validity of the text, but also the validity of the specific production and the directors' work, and the validity of the audience's engagement with theatre is questioned and disputed. The audience is encouraged to reflect on their own relations to and expectations of both the canonical plays and the theatre itself. Neither the canon nor the theatre is taken for granted, but both institutions are scrutinised in attempts at exploring what value they have in contemporary society.

Such questioning of the value and validity of the theatrical production itself has been a feature I have returned to in my discussions of several productions throughout the thesis. When Christopher Rüping highlighted the violence and destructive nature of both Hamlet the character and *Hamlet* the play, he indirectly questioned this text's status and traditional interpretations as culturally valuable. In previous chapters, I have argued that the production questioned the cultural value of *Hamlet* by pointing to how violent the main character is and how easily some of his most famous words might be twisted to fit a fundamentalist, violent and potentially dangerous worldview. A similar process was at work in the confrontation between the actor Amina Sewali and the character Solveig in Mørk-Eidem's *Peer Gynt*. Sewali jeopardised the play's validity by refusing to identify with the compliant nature of the character Solveig and by accusing Peer, Ibsen and the culture that has canonised them of misogynist views. Similarly, by closing off the access to the nature at Gålå, Sigrid Strøm Reibo asked the audience to reflect on what kind of ideological statement was being made when the national epos *Peer Gynt* was performed in the iconic mountain landscape. She refused uncritically to accept the basic conditions of her own production, namely that there is a special relation between *Peer Gynt*, the mountain landscape and Norwegian identity. All of these productions challenged the cultural value of their source texts. Instead of accepting them as part of the canon, the productions asked questions about why the texts are part of the canon

and what kind of ideology their canonicity actually expresses. They were not only productions of the texts, but what, as I referred to in chapter one, Whitaker Long calls 'arguing' productions – productions that were in conversation and debate with the texts they were based on.

Self-reflexive dialogue with the source material featured more prominently in some productions compared to others. Perhaps the clearest example of an attempt to explicitly negotiate the relationship between the contemporary production and the canonical play is Rüping's production of *Drums in the Night*. I demonstrated how Rüping continuously went into conversation with the play, with the conditions of the original performance, and with Brecht's ideas and theories of theatre. Throughout the production, Rüping invited the audience to reflect on the value of theatre and on their own relation to this specific theatrical event and to theatre more generally. For example, the audience was invited to reimagine the original performance in 1922 and through this reflect on the different conditions for theatre then and now. Through suggestive use of music, the audience was invited to participate in a revolutionary atmosphere, and through the abrupt interruption of this musical revolution, they were encouraged to scrutinise how revolutionary feelings occur and what they do. In short, as I demonstrated in my discussion, theatre and the relations between theatre and society were perhaps the most important topic in Rüping's production. Where Brecht in *Drums in the Night* presented politics and revolution on stage, Rüping's production had as its starting point an exploration of whether such political theatre is possible at all. The production was not a reproduction of Brecht's play, but an exploration of what a reproduction of Brecht's play meant and could mean in the context of 2017.

The examples above demonstrate that what many of the productions I have discussed in this thesis have in common is exactly this point. These productions are not first and foremost reproductions of canonical plays, but explorations of what reproducing canonical

plays in the twenty-first century means. I would argue that this kind of reflective attitude towards their own conditions and value is the starting point for a certain form of political impact for these productions. In chapter one, I referred to Whitaker Long's four categories of performance, of which the last one is 'arguing'. Long describes such 'arguing' performances in the following way:

> Instead of exploring the text (as in reporting), mediating the text (as in evoking), or experiencing the text (as in enacting), performers metaphorically hold the written text at arm's length and perform their own commentary on it, pose their own questions to it (1991: 111).

The examples I have presented, in different ways and to varying extents, fall into this category of commenting and questioning the texts they are based on. From the challenging of gender politics in Hill-Gibbins *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to actively engaging with canonicity in Arnarsson's *Hamlet* to questioning and challenging the whole theatrical situation in Rüping's *Drums in the Night*, the productions do not take the canonical material for granted but attempt to explore it and comment on it, as Long describes.

However, as I have demonstrated, the potential that lies in such 'arguing' goes further than Long's description. The productions I have discussed are not only arguing against the canonical texts, but also against themselves and thus against the practice of theatregoing generally. The goal of such arguing or challenging is not to declare theatregoing as politically futile, but rather to attempt to create a position from which the theatre and the society and culture it is part of can be seen in a clearer and more critical light. This point ties back to my discussion in chapter one of Louis Althusser's essay 'The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht'. In this essay, Althusser suggests that theatre is always permeated with ideological meaning, or as he puts it: 'performance is, fundamentally, the occasion for a cultural and ideological recognition' (2005: 149). According to Althusser, audiences in the theatre

recognise and identify with theatre's underlying ideological structures before they engage with any other aspect of what is shown on stage. Althusser is sceptical of theatre that lets its own ideological implications go unscrutinised. He argues that uncriticised ideology in the theatre are 'simply the 'familiar', 'well-known', transparent myths in which a society or an age can recognize itself (but not know itself), the mirror it looks into for self-recognition', and he suggests that this is 'precisely the mirror [society] must break if it is to know itself' (2005: 144). Althusser suggests that the theatre encourages cultural and ideological recognition, but in order to become an artform through which society can learn something about itself, the ideological implications of the theatrical event must first be scrutinised, challenged and renegotiated. In order to explore and fulfil its political potentials, a theatrical production must first explore and scrutinise the ideological foundations on which it is built. The kind of self-reflection I have identified in the productions I discuss can be seen as a starting point for exactly this kind of ideological scrutiny. The productions do not just reproduce the canon and its values but they attempt, in different ways, to reveal what such reproductions suggest in the contemporary context. They encourage the audience to take neither the canonical material nor the theatrical situation for granted, but to reflect on what kind of experience they are participating in.

To further understand how self-reflection can become a starting point for a critical theatre that attempts to not take its own ideological structures for granted, one can return to Brecht and his *Verfremdungseffekt*. According to Brecht, the point of *Verfremdung* is to estrange 'an incident or character simply by taking from the incident or character what is self-evident, familiar, obvious in order to produce wonder and curiosity' (2015: 143). There is an important link between this quote and the productions I have discussed. In these productions, it is not only the incidents and characters portrayed which are estranged, but the actual theatrical situation itself. The productions seek to take from themselves what is self-evident,

familiar, obvious. They refuse to take for granted the value both of the canonical plays they are based on and that of the actual meeting between theatre and audience that they create. Brecht argues that his *Verfremdungseffekt* produces an attitude of 'wonder and curiosity' in the audience, and it is this attitude that makes it possible for the audience to critically reflect on the incidents and characters (2015: 143). I would argue that in their most successful moments, the productions I discuss in this thesis create a similar sense of wonder and curiosity in their audience, but that the wonder and curiosity is directed towards the actual theatrical experience. In different ways, these productions encourage their audiences to critically reflect on the theatrical experience itself. They implicitly ask the audience why they have come to the theatre at all, why they want to watch a production of a canonical play, and what they hope can come out of such an experience. Thus, the productions attempt to create in the audience an attitude that questions not only what the theatre presents them with, but also the conditions and value of the theatrical experience as such.

This attitude of self-reflection that these theatrical productions instill, first in themselves and then in their audiences, is perhaps the starting point for moving towards the counter-hegemonic practices described by Mouffe as well, although in a more indirect way. As I pointed out in chapter one, Mouffe claims that '[a]ccording to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate' (2007, unpaginated). It is not obvious that the productions I have discussed make visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. They are based on the hegemonic institution of 'the canon', an institution that, as I have demonstrated, is an expression of hegemonic ideology and power structures. To a certain extent, they reproduce such hegemonic structures themselves. By choosing to reproduce Shakespeare, Ibsen and Brecht, the theatre, including the six directors I study, continue to establish these white, male, European authors as central to contemporary culture. However, the attitude of

self-reflection that the productions induce, does open up for a more complex relationship between canonical texts, contemporary theatre and hegemony. While reproducing the canon in the contemporary context, these productions also question the usefulness of this practice and of the canon in general. This might instigate an attitude which makes it possible to question and challenge other institutions and structures as well. Productions that engage with the kind of self-reflection I have described might encourage audiences not to take what they see for granted, first inside and then perhaps even outside the theatre. In her visions of art, Mouffe sees a 'possibility of a revitalization of the emancipatory project, to which artistic practices could make a decisive contribution' (2013: 86). I would argue that only by beginning with questioning itself can the theatre take a position where it is possible to challenge hegemonic ideology and power structures and take part in 'the emancipatory project' that Mouffe envisages. Only by acknowledging, interrogating and critiquing its own ideological foundations can a theatrical production begin to challenge hegemonic structures in culture and society.

However, even if partaking in an emancipatory project through processes of self-reflection might be theoretically possible, it is hard to achieve in practice. I do not mean to argue that the productions I discuss in this thesis are clear examples of 'critical', counter-hegemonic art. Actually, there are many features of these productions that suggest a participation in and continuation of hegemonic structures. I have already mentioned how the canon – while being questioned in the ways I have described – still of course is perpetuated and reinforced through these productions. Moreover, the productions were created within large theatrical institutions that receive funding both from governments and public bodies and/or from wealthy donors. Thus, the theatres are part of hegemony and of dominant power structures. In chapter one, I described how Mouffe's concept of art begins with questioning whether 'artistic practices still [can] play a role in a society where the difference between art

and advertising have become blurred and where artists and cultural workers have become a necessary part of capitalist production' (2007, unpaginated). The productions I discuss in this thesis are part of the hegemonic capitalist structures of contemporary society, and one can therefore question whether they have any ability at all to critique those same structures. The self-reflexive nature of many of these productions that I have described above does not necessarily counter such objections to the political implications of the productions. While I believe that the audience in these productions are encouraged to question both the canon, the nature of the theatre's engagement with the canon and their own roles as audience members, a solution to and suggested result of such questioning is rarely presented. The audience is not actually asked to abandon the canon and its values. And finally, while the productions might critique the values and ideologies of the canon and of contemporary culture and society, they do not suggest clear paths the audience members could take to alter the situation or to counter hegemonic structures.

Nevertheless, whilst not representing clear examples of Mouffe's 'critical art', the kind of self-reflection I have identified in these productions can be seen as a move towards fulfilling some of Mouffe's visions for such art. While the productions do not necessarily point out exactly what hegemony is and how it can be countered, they do encourage audiences not to take dominant structures for granted. As I have demonstrated, this happens first and foremost within the frames of the theatrical experience itself. The self-reflection I have pointed out in these productions is an attempt to scrutinise and reveal the ideological foundation of the theatre itself. In the productions, the directors and their teams put their own engagement and work with the canonical texts on stage. Thus, the canon (and the fact that the theatre continuously reproduces it) is not taken for granted, but this practice is instead interrogated and challenged from within. The audience is invited to take part in and reflect on the work the theatrical artists do with the canon. Thus, these productions attempt, in line with

Althusser's argument above, to deny audiences' uncritical identification with the ideological foundations of the canon and of the theatrical situation. At least one kind of hegemonic ideological structure is revealed and interrogated in these productions, namely the ideological foundations of the theatre itself. By continuously putting not only the canonical plays but also the conditions and ideological framework of the theatrical reproductions of the plays under scrutiny, the productions encourage the audience towards active critical reflection on their own relationship to the canon and to theatre. The question is whether this kind of ideological interrogation also happens in relation to structures outside the theatre. I will further investigate this question in the next two sections, where I discuss in greater depth the kind of spectatorship that these productions produce and the ways in which the processes of self-reflection can be seen as attempts at creating politically aware audiences.

6.2 Forming collective identities

In chapter one, I discussed Mouffe's theories on the contribution of art and democracy in the formation of collective identities. As Mouffe puts it: 'Once we accept that identities are never pre-given but that they are always the result of processes of identification, that they are discursively constructed, the question that arises is the type of identity that critical artistic practices should aim at fostering' (2007, unpaginated). One of the possible political implications of art, according to this view, is the construction of collective identities. Collective identities are unstable and are continuously reconstructed. Art can participate productively in this process by disrupting hegemonic and exclusive collective identities; pointing to and helping to form counter-hegemonic and inclusive ones. Mouffe argues that the kind of art she sees as 'critical art' is characterised by forming collective identities around democratic principles, or, as she puts it, critical art should contribute to 'creating collective forms of identification around democratic objectives' (2013: 9). As I discussed when I

introduced her theories in chapter one, Mouffe's view of democratic principles and objectives is indivisibly tied to the concept of agonism, which she defines as a form of conflict where 'others' 'are not seen as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas might be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas is not questioned' (2013: 7). Mouffe suggests that one way that art can become counter-hegemonic is by challenging traditional forms of collective identities and suggesting new forms of collective identities that are founded on agonistic principles where 'others' are seen as adversaries, not enemies. In this subchapter, I discuss how the productions I study, and particularly the strategies of self-reflection I have identified in them, relate to 'collective identities'. I explore whether revealing and interrogating the theatre's ideological foundation, as I proposed that the productions did above, also leads to a disruption of hegemonic collective identities and the formation of new ones around democratic principles.

The notion of 'collective identities' is significant for a discussion of what role canonical texts and theatrical reproductions of them play in contemporary culture. To understand the way in which canonical texts are part of 'collective identities', it is useful to look to the growing field of cultural memory studies, and particularly to see canonical texts in relation to what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*. *Lieux de mémoire* literally means 'sites of memory', but it is important to note that Nora's meaning extends beyond geographical sites. Nora defines a *lieu de mémoire* as 'any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community' (1996: xvii). Canonical plays can be seen to fit this definition. They are entities that have become symbolic elements of the memorial heritage of a community. Canonical plays are part of a community's cultural heritage and inform the ideologies and practices of the community's way of life. As such, they participate (as all forms of cultural memory do) in the formation of the collective identity. Jan Assman and John

Czaplicka argue that collective identity formation – or 'concretion of identity' – is the main function of cultural memory. They see cultural memory as part of a process where 'a group bases its consciousness of unity and specificity upon this knowledge [of shared, cultural memory] and derives formative and normative impulses from it, which allows the group to reproduce its identity' (1995: 128). In their view, it is through cultural memory that a community establishes itself as a unity with a specific identity, and the main texts, including canonical plays, of the community are of course part of this process. Thus, there is a clear relationship between a community's shared identity and the canon, where the canon can be seen as an expression of the hegemonic values, ideologies and identities in the community. If we take this relationship between the canon, cultural memory and the formation of collective identities into account, once again it seems that the canon is an unpromising starting point for counter-hegemonic artistic practices. The canon is, as part of the cultural memory of a community, an expression of traditional, hegemonic and exclusive collective identities. The theatre, through reproductions of canonical plays, contributes to the construction and reinforcement of such 'traditional' collective identities.

However, as I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, the directors I study often express a wish not to reproduce canonical texts uncritically, but to interrogate and challenge the role such texts play in cultural memory and in the formation of contemporary collective identities. Challenging the relationship between the canon and cultural identity seems to be a main purpose of the self-reflexive strategies I have identified in their productions. These productions do not only question why the canon is reproduced, but they also explore and potentially critique the role canonical texts and the values they express play in contemporary culture. If canonical texts can be seen as *lieux de mémoire* and thus as part of the cultural memory that constitutes collective identities, theatrical productions can interrogate the kinds of cultural memory and collective identities that the canon constitutes and that audiences

subscribe to by watching productions of canonical plays. In short, they can attempt to disrupt collective identities. The director that most clearly expresses this goal in the interviews I have conducted is Christopher Rüping, who argues:

> *Hamlet* and all the canonical plays, they are already part of our cultural identity. (…) And I like to question those parts of our cultural identity. (…) And that's why I like to adapt those canonical texts: because they are already part of our cultural identity, and so I like to ask why, what that says about us (2017).

According to Rüping, productions of *Hamlet* and other canonical plays do not necessarily have to become confirmations of hegemonic and traditional collective identities – they can also become investigations of and challenges to collective identities. The question, then, is whether the productions I have discussed realise this potential, how they relate to collective identities and cultural memory, and what kind of collective identities they create.

As I have argued throughout the thesis, several of the productions I study seek to disrupt the traditional views of the canonical texts they are based on and of the canonical authors and their position in contemporary national and Western culture. Some examples I have discussed include the way Rüping explored contemporary society's relation to violence and extremism by highlighting the violent nature of Hamlet, the ways both Mørk-Eidem and Strøm-Reibo interrogated and challenged the relations between Ibsen, *Peer Gynt* and Norwegian culture and identity, and the way Rice and Arnarsson challenged the setting of their productions (Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and the Ibsen Festival, respectively) in their stagings. These productions seem reluctant to participate in the reproduction of traditional cultural memory through the canon. The directors seem to acknowledge that the canon expresses and represents ideologies and values that are problematic in relation to contemporary sensibilities. To counter these features of the canon, the directors create productions that set out to disrupt the relation between the canon and the contemporary

situation. By questioning the role specific canonical texts play in the formation of cultural memory, the productions, I argue, attempt to disrupt both the hegemonic collective identities that the canon expresses and the kinds of collective identities that are traditionally formed in the theatre in general. These productions do not uncritically accept or celebrate the canon as part of the cultural memory that constitutes collective identities, but seek instead to investigate what it says about contemporary culture and society that these texts have become part of that cultural memory. The texts of the canon are not (only) seen as authorities from the past, but as cultural expressions that are to be critically engaged with and challenged in the present. The value in canonical texts is found not necessarily in their perceived 'quality', but in the ways these texts are expressions of hegemonic cultural memories and therefore can be used as an investigation of values and ideologies in contemporary culture. The self-reflexive attitude that I have identified, where theatrical productions question and challenge both the canon and their own conditions, makes it difficult for the audience to simply identify with the artwork they are presented with, and they are instead encouraged to reflect on what kind of experience the canon and the theatre give them. Thus, these productions disrupt simple formation and confirmation of collective identities.

This is not to say that these productions necessarily form radically new collective identities. It is worth here going back to how Mouffe describes the relationship between critical art and collective identities. Mouffe argues that the key aspect of critical art relates to its ability 'in making visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate, in giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony' (2013: 92-93). While several of the productions I have discussed attempt to question the hegemonic nature of the canon and the ideological foundations of the theatrical situation itself, it is difficult to see how they give a voice to oppressed or excluded groups in society. However, these productions can be seen as coming close to forming more progressive

collective identities in the way Mouffe describes, namely through encouraging collective identifications around democratic objectives and democratic principles. Above, I have argued that the self-reflexive strategies employed in the productions under consideration disrupt audience identification with the hegemonic values and ideologies of the canon and of the theatrical situation. While it is difficult to see how the productions clearly propagate new forms of collective identities by making space for previously oppressed and excluded voices, the way the productions employ self-reflection and self-scrutiny can be seen as a progression towards democratic principles. In these productions, the audience is encouraged to reflect on the play, the production, and the theatrical situation that is created and to not take either the theatrical situation nor their own spectatorship for granted. Althusser claims that the theatre first appeals to its audience through making them identify with hegemonic structures and ideologies. These productions disrupt this first identification through constantly scrutinising and challenging the canon and their own conditions. Thus, even if the productions reproduce the canon and its associated hegemonic values and ideologies, they do at least attempt to reflect on what such reproductions mean including the possible problematic sides to it. In this way, the productions demonstrate for the audience how hegemonic structures, even when they are reproduced, can be the object of critical reflection and scrutiny. I would argue that such strategies can be a starting point for theatre to contribute to 'democratic collective identities'. The theatre might not bring down hegemony itself, as it were, but it can encourage audiences to question hegemonic structures and participate in agonistic processes of open debates. Theatre's potential to encourage 'agonistic' debate will be explored in the next section, which focuses on how the kind of productions discussed relate to the concept of agonistic public space.

6.3 Agonistic public space

In chapter one, I argued that Mouffe's concept of an agonistic public space is particularly suited for the theatre, which is already a public space that facilitates live meetings between people. Traditionally, the concept of the 'public space' has been defined as a space in which views are debated in order to reach a consensus, and I mentioned Jürgen Habermas as a main representative of this view. In Habermas' view, while different views and arguments have a role to play in the public space, the goal is always to get rid of differences and reach a consensus that is in the interest of all. Mouffe disagrees with the consensus-driven view of the public space. As I have discussed in the introduction, she sees consensus as an expression of hegemony and power, and she therefore does not agree that consensus should be the ultimate goal of debate in the public space. Instead, she argues for an agonistic public space 'where conflicting points of view are confronted without any possibility of a final reconciliation' (2013: 92). As Mouffe envisages it, the public space is not where consensus is reached but where views are presented, debated, fought out and defended in order to secure representation for a plurality of views and voices. Thus, if the theatre is to become an agonistic public space in Mouffe's sense, it needs to facilitate presentation and discussion of a plurality of views on society.

To enable such a function of the theatre, it seems necessary to scrutinise the ideological conditions that are at the base of the theatrical situation. As I have discussed at several instances, the kind of theatre I study in this thesis can be seen as part of hegemonic culture, based as it is on the hegemonic institution of the canon. In order for a plurality of views to be visible, therefore, the theatre needs to scrutinise its own ideological conditions. This is where Peter Boenisch's reflection on Brecht, which I discussed in chapter one, becomes useful. Boenisch refers to 'the engagement of the audience members not only in their role as spectators within the theatrical communication, but as members of a public

sphere that extends far beyond the walls of the theatre into 'real life'', and he argues that the theatre can make 'the gaps in our 'everyday' ideological fantasy experientially and affectively tangible' (2017: 85). In this understanding, the theatre can become a public space that encourages investigation of ideological assumptions. The self-reflection I have found in the productions analysed can be seen as the starting point for such investigation of ideological assumptions, because these productions begin with an investigation of their own ideological implications; thereby opening up possibilities for making alternative ideological conditions visible. The question is whether the theatrical productions discussed create public meetings that can be seen in relation to Mouffe's view of an agonistic public space. I argue that the productions, through their self-reflexive attitude towards their own ideological conditions and towards their engagement with the canon, can encourage ways of participating in the public sphere that invite people productively to engage with their own ideological assumptions.

As I have argued throughout this thesis and particularly in this final chapter, a common thread through many of the productions I study is how they scrutinise their own conditions and ideological foundations. Several of the productions are not taken-for-granted reproductions of the canon or of certain theatrical conventions and traditions, but instead they seem to investigate what kind of cultural and political event they are, and often they present this investigation to the audience directly in the staging or even encourage the audience to participate in it. Thus, the productions do not take the kind of public spaces they create for granted, but instead they seek to reflect on what kinds of public space they create, and they invite the audience to participate in this reflection. This reflection on the implications of the theatrical situation as a public space can be seen as a form of 'metatheatre', and I will briefly discuss this concept in order to understand how the productions I discuss interrogate themselves as public spaces. The term 'metatheatre' is usually used to describe theatre that directly points to itself as theatre. Jean-Pierre Maquerlot gives the following definition:

> I suggest we use the concept of "metadrama" to designate all forms of playing within the *play-text* that call attention to the dramatic and theatrical codes subsuming the dramatic fiction. Similarly "metatheatre" will designate all forms of playing within the *performance-text* that call attention to the dramatic and theatrical codes subsuming the stage representation (1990: 42).

Maquerlot's definition fits the kind of self-reflection I have identified in the productions I study, as calling attention to the dramatic and theatrical codes subsuming the stage representation is exactly what these productions do. In fact, these productions go one step further. They not only call attention to these codes but seek to interrogate and negotiate them in plain sight of the audience. 'Metatheatre' can be and has been discussed at length and from several points of view, but what seems clear is that metatheatrical strategies often aim to involve the audience in the performance they are watching. By pointing to the theatrical event, the theatre is also pointing to how necessary the audience is for what is going on and thus the audience is invited to participate intellectually and sometimes often directly and physically in the performance. Paul Yachnin and Myrna Wyatt Selkirk argue that metatheatrical strategies can lead to 'the members of the audience [enjoying] a heightening of vitality and community from the process of watching the play' (2009: 156). Taking Yachnin and Selkirk into account, I would argue, as I did in my MA thesis on metatheatre in contemporary productions of Shakespeare, that metatheatrical strategies draw the audience closer into the theatre experience and encourage them to participate more actively in thinking about what kind of public space and event the theatre constitutes (Maagerø, 2015).

Several of the productions I have discussed are examples of theatre which directly call attention to and negotiate the particular public space they constitute. The most sustained example is probably Rüping's *Drums in the Night*, which I discussed in chapter five. Through focusing on the original production of the play in the same theatre in 1922, Rüping sought to

establish a connection not only between the artists and audience of his own production but also between this contemporary event and the one ninetyfive years earlier. The audience was encouraged to reflect on the contemporary theatrical situation and cultural context and the circumstances and context of the original production. Thus, the audience was invited to reflect on the meaning of the play in an explicit way, both with regards to its original meaning (what it could have meant in Munich in 1922) and its possible meanings today. They were also invited to reflect on the different conditions of theatregoing and what it would have meant in 1922 to see the production of the new play *Drums in the Night* compared to what it means to see the same play, now a canonical text from a different time, in the same theatre today. The production continuously encouraged the audience to join the artists in this self-reflection, a point that was highlighted throughout Rüping's staging, particularly in moments where the actors joined the audience in the auditorium. At one point for example, the actors sat down among the audience and watched the empty set while what sounded like a recording of the original production was played. Thus, the actors joined the audience in a re-imagination of the original production, and the borders between actors and audience was explicitly blurred in an attempt to investigate the current theatrical situation in comparison to the 1922 production.

Several other examples of similar situations illustrate how the productions critically engaged with the public space they constituted. I argued that Sigrid Strøm Reibo's *Peer Gynt* at Gålå refused to take the stereotypical relationship between the play and the Norwegian mountain landscape for granted. The whole event surrounding the performances at Gålå, including the tents with food and souvenirs, is set up to create a celebratory and excited atmosphere around the connection between the play and the iconic landscape. Strøm Reibo problematised these features in her production by making the whole play into a theme park and playing with audience expectations of the surrounding nature. Thus, the production asked the audience to reflect on their relation to the performance, to the event as such and to a

stereotypical form of Norwegian collective identity. The audience was encouraged to question the ideological implications of the event and reflect on what kind of meanings it creates. An even clearer example of a direct metatheatrical interrogation of the theatrical event can be seen in the scene of the public meeting in Arnarsson's *Enemy of the Duck*, which I also discussed in chapter four. As mentioned, the actor Mads Ousdal used the opportunity of the public meeting to not only confess that he had lost faith in the theatre, but to also explicitly challenge the audience to reflect on what they hoped to achieve through attending a production of Ibsen's plays today. This moment asked questions about whether Ibsen specifically (and theatre generally) can have any meaning at all, and it did this within perhaps the most prestigious theatrical context in Norway, The International Ibsen Festival at the National Theatre. The audience was free to agree or disagree with the challenges that were posed from the stage, but they were strongly encouraged to reflect not only on Ibsen's plays and their content, but on what it means to continue to perform Ibsen and devote a festival to his works today.

The common thread running throughout these examples is that these productions actively negotiated the kinds of public space they constituted. As I mentioned in chapter one, in Mouffe's agonistic approach, 'the public space is where conflicting points of view are confronted without any possibility of a final reconciliation' (2013: 92). In the productions I have discussed, the actual meeting they constitute with the audience is not seen as final, but as constantly up for negotiation. Once again, it is in the self-reflexive nature of these productions – in this case the constant negotiation of the kind of public space the performance constitutes – that the productions' political implications and potentials become visible. Instead of focusing on political topics outside the theatre, the productions I discuss have political implications because they ask questions about the validity of theatrical performance and canonical texts themselves, and thus, audiences are encouraged to reflect on their visit to the

theatre and what theatre should do. The important issue here is not the topics presented, but the kind of attitude the productions encourage in their audiences. Productions that use metatheatrical strategies of self-reflection encourage the audience to question the traditional conventions, ideologies and hegemonies of the theatrical situation. Instead of taking the canonical source material or themselves as theatrical productions for granted, the productions investigate their own place within dominant ideology and power structures. Thus, they lead the way in encouraging the audience to do the same. The audience are encouraged to reflect on the ideological foundations of the theatre, and, taking Boenisch's reflection above into consideration, also on their own everyday ideological assumptions and 'fantasies'. These productions become examples of Mouffe's agonistic public space because the goal is not to replace one set of ideologies and structures with another, not to reach agreement and consensus, but to constantly question and challenge hegemonic orders and the ideological assumptions both of the theatre and its audiences. Thus, these productions present a multitude of views and ideas about what the theatre might, could and should be. But, taking Boenisch's point about the audience also being members of the public into account, this kind of theatre also attempts to scrutinise and reflect on ideological assumptions in culture and society. These productions, then, define public spaces where ideology, culture and society can be debated through self-reflection.

6.4 The Political Potential of Directors' Theatre Engaging with Canonical Text

I began this thesis with a question: Why do theatre directors continue to (re)produce the literary canon? This question contains a paradox that has been everpresent in my discussions: While theatre always happens in the here and now and therefore speaks to contemporary audiences and situations, the theatre continues to reproduce the literary canon with its texts from the past. And while canon criticism has been an important feature of scholarship on

literature and art in recent decades, criticism of the canon has rarely been a feature in the theatre where canonical texts have continued to constitute a large part of the repertoire. My project set out to explore why the literary canon is reproduced in contemporary directors' theatre, and what such theatre achieves in contemporary culture and society. As I have pointed out at several points throughout the thesis, the canon is part of hegemonic culture, and reproducing the canon always risks reproducing the hegemonic order, ideologies and power structures of the status quo. This issue is similar to the question Chantal Mouffe poses as her starting point for discussing the critical potential of art: Is it possible for art today to give any form of subversive esperience, or is all artistic practice too submersed in hegemonic capitalist structures for this to be possible? Mouffe points out that a serious issue to consider is that art in contemporary capitalism might have 'lost its critical power because any form of critique is automatically recuperated and neutralized by capitalism' (2007, unpaginated). Mouffe argues that what she calls 'critical art' might challenge this view, but many forms of artistic practices must still be said to be part of, rather than a challenge to, hegemonic order. This can, as I have pointed out throughout the thesis, also be said about the productions I discuss, not least because of their reliance on the hegemonic institution of the canon. I am not in this final chapter suggesting that the productions I study overcome the difficulties Mouffe points to and provide their audiences with experiences that actually subvert and reconfigure hegemony. As Mouffe describes, such experiences are difficult, if not almost impossible, to achieve. Throughout this thesis, I have also pointed out how an uncritical view of the canon persists in the theatre and also among the directors I study. For example, in chapter two, I discussed how the directors seem, often uncritically, to accept the canon as of particularly 'high quality' without acknowledging how selection to the canon is an institutional and exclusive process based on power and ideology. The theatrical productions I discuss in this thesis contribute to

this process through reproducing the canon in the contemporary context, and they are therefore to a large extent part of, rather than a challenge to, hegemonic structures.

However, in chapter two I also demonstrated how the directors I study proclaim that one reason they have for producing canonical texts is that productions of such texts give them opportunities to question the canon and hegemonic structures in contemporary culture. This reasoning has been the starting point for the investigations I have carried out throughout the thesis of how directors question and challenge both the canon and the hegemonic culture it is part of in their stagings. I have identified several self-reflexive strategies in the directors' productions where the productions actively and openly negotitate the canonical texts they are based on and the conditions in which the productions themselves are created and performed. While not abandoning or subverting hegemonic order, these productions at least attempt to scrutinise and interrogate hegemonic order from within, and they invite and encourage their audiences to participate in this scrutiny and interrogation. In these productions, audiences are encouraged to reflect on what the canon and the theatre is and on their own relations to these institutions.

I argue that the self-reflexive strategies that are present in the work of the directors I study, is a starting point for critical resistance from within the hegemonic order. The political potentials of the productions I have discussed can be found in their constant self-reflexive negotiation of their own ideological foundations. I have demonstrated that these productions often do not take their own ideological foundations for granted, particularly in relation to the reproduction of the canon. Canonical texts are not simply acknowledged, accepted and uncritically reproduced, but in different ways the productions scrutinise the texts, ask what it means to reproduce them in the contemporary and what it says about contemporary culture that these texts are reproduced and proclaimed as canonical again and again. I have used Mouffe's theories of agonism and 'critical art' to demonstrate how canonical texts participate

in continually reconstituting hegemonic ideologies and how directors in their productions attempt to disrupt the relationship between the canon and hegemony. I have explored how the productions seek to form collective identifications around critical attitudes towards what is put on stage. I have also demonstrated how they attempt to create public spaces where audiences are encouraged to critically reflect on what is put in front of them and what kind of event they are participating in. In these ways, one can argue that the productions are attempts at what Althusser points to in his essay 'The 'Piccolo Teatro': On Bertolazzi and Brecht', which I quoted in the first part of this chapter. Althusser argues that theatre first needs to break its own ideological mirrors in order to become a place where society learns about itself. The directors I have studied attempt exactly this: to break the ideological mirrors of their own theatrical productions. They attempt to avoid presenting the audience with taken for granted ideological relationships in the theatre. Instead they attempt to involve the audience in critical reflections on what the theatre, and particularly theatre based on canonical texts, is and what it could be. The audience is encouraged not to take the theatrical situations for granted, but to constantly question them and participate in a renegotiation of the theatrical experience for every new performance. Thus, while perpetuating the canon through reproduction, these productions also offer canon criticism, or at least canon scrutiny. The productions demonstrate how it is possible to both be part of and simultaneously challenge the hegemonic structure of the canon. I therefore argue that in these productions, the canon criticism that has been important in academia, makes its way into the theatre. The result is not that the canon is abandoned, but that canon criticism – criticism of the values the canon expresses and of values in the contemporary culture that has selected texts for the canon – has become an intrinsic part of the theatrical reproduction of the canon.

Some reservations need, however, to be taken regarding the political implications of the productions I have studied. While these productions encourage audiences to critically

scrutinise the ideological implications of the canon and of the theatrical experiences they participate in, the question remains of whether such self-reflexive scrutiny of the canon and of theatre has any political value outside the theatre, whether the productions counter hegemonic structures in the ways Mouffe argues are characteristic of 'critical art'. I do not argue in this thesis that the productions I have studied are clear examples of what Mouffe calls 'critical art'. As I have mentioned in chapter one, Mouffe describes 'critical art' in the following way:

> The agonistic approach sees critical art as constituted by a manifold of artistic practices bringing to the fore the existence of alternatives to the current post-political order. Its critical dimension consists in making visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate, in giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony (2013: 92-93).

The productions I have discussed in this thesis only partially meet Mouffe's criteria. Taking the discussions from this chapter into account, I would argue that in many instances the productions do make visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. The directors refuse to let dominant consensus around canonical texts and theatrical performances be the basis for their productions. Instead, they use their productions to investigate what the canon and theatregoing is and what audiences expect from it, often challenging these expectations. However, what these productions rarely achieve, is, as Mouffe puts it, to provide a platform for 'all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony' (2013: 93). The productions often question their own ideological conditions and contexts and they encourage the audience to participate in this questioning, but they rarely present any positive solutions to the questions they raise. They do not clearly suggest new relationships between the theatre and the canon or new ways for the audience to engage with the theatre and the canon or new ways for the theatre to relate to wider processes in culture and society. As such, the productions are provocative towards audience

expectations and towards traditions of canon reproduction, but they do not suggest a clear way forward when it comes to the theatre's relation to the canon and to hegemony.

Nevertheless, I argue that the kind of theatrical engagement with the canon that I have studied in this thesis has at least some political value in society outside the theatre. This value lies in the ways the productions encourage critical reflection on the formation of collective identities and public spaces. Through directly engaging with and challenging audience expectation of the canon and to theatre, these productions disturb they ways in which hegemonic structures are usually accepted (i.e., passively). In his reflection on Althusser, which I have quoted above, Boenisch suggests that audience members in the theatre are also members of the public. When the theatre reveals its own ideological foundations to the audience, it also demonstrates for the audience how what Boenisch calls 'the gaps in our 'everyday' ideological fantasy' can be revealed as well. The political implications of these productions are that they attempt to encourage people to reflect on the way we structure processes in society, the ways in which we engage with each other in the public space and the ways in which we form collective identities. It is in these ways that theatrical reproductions of the canon can move beyond mere reproduction of hegemonic ideology and traditional power structures: By questioning, interrogating and challenging the canon and the conditions of the theatrical experience, theatrical productions of canonical texts can become experiements for how we can reflect on and challenge other hegemonic structures in society.

To sum up, I set out to study why and how contemporary directors keep reproducing the literary canon in the theatre and the political implications of such reproduction. I have demonstrated that while the canon is an expression of hegemonic culture, directors also attempt to disrupt and challenge the canon and hegemonic culture through their productions. Through my analyses I have identified several self-reflexive strategies that the directors employ in their stagings in order to encourage the audience to go beyond passively accepting

the canon and the theatrical performance they experience, but to also reflect on their own relation to the canon and to theatre. In this final chapter, I have discussed how these strategies, while not countering all the problematic features of the canon, can be seen as a move toward a more critical engagement with the canon in the theatre. I hope that theatrical artists will continue to experiment with ways of engaging with the canon critically and with making such critical engagement with the canon visible to the audience in the performance situation. I believe that such practices can lead to a theatre where the canon is employed not to confirm hegemonic structures and ideology, but as a starting point for discussing, challenging and renegotiating contemporary culture.

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